

## Interpretation of Children's Painting and Child Drawing

Jie Miao

Nantong University, Nantong 226001, Jiangsu Province, China

**Abstract:** In the process of children's growth, in addition to the development of language and movement skills, the development of thinking is also a great leap forward period. For painting, from the initial contact with painting materials to the gradual completion of painting works, a series of development process of the whole painting has become another form for us to understand a child. Painting is different from language. Painting itself is an activity. Children's painting is rich, unique, spontaneous and complex, which is a means of communication. Similar to language, but it is a special symbolic representation.

**Keywords:** Children's painting; Children's painting; Psychology expression; Emotion

**Publication date:** June, 2020

**Publication online:** 30 June, 2020

**\*Corresponding author:** Jie Miao, 553269490@qq.com

Children's painting is an attractive and challenging research field in children's psychological development. As a preschool educator, every time I observe children's painting activities and interpret their paintings, I will be moved by their unique ways of expression and their childlike interest. The uniqueness of children's painting lies in children's thoughts and activities contained in the painting. It is no exaggeration to say that without the study of children's painting, it is impossible to understand the colorful world of childlike innocence in children's painting. For children, painting is a representation of people's psychology, personality, emotion, interpersonal relationship, culture and social influence. When it is impossible to express with language, it expresses depression, anxiety, fear and loneliness through painting, which shows that art plays an important role in reflecting and carrying emotions.

### 1 The research process of children's painting

Early Freud and Jung showed great interest in the internal connection between works of art and personality. Freud noticed that the representation and symbol of a person's forgotten or repressed memory would be revealed in dreams or works of art. In his early theory, 《Interpretation of dreams》 and 《Introduction to psychoanalysis》 have been mentioned. Jung's view is different from Freud's, he said: "Drawing what we can see in front of us and drawing what we can see in our hearts are two different arts"<sup>[1]</sup>. In his opinion, fantasy through symbols is a way for the inner world to seek for self comfort when experiencing psychological trauma or suffering<sup>[2]</sup>. They try to interpret children's painting with psychoanalytic theory, but in fact, they can't fully interpret it only with psychoanalytic theory. It must be combined with other theories, such as behaviorism theory.

The real study of children's painting appeared in the late 19th century and the early 20th century. After them, there were a series of researchers, Cook (1885), Ricci (1887), Goodenough (1926), Harris (1963), Buck (1948), Machover (1949). It can be seen from Machover's point of view that painting, especially the painter, represents the conflict characteristics, defense mechanism, neurosis and pathological characteristics of the painter<sup>[3]</sup>. Different from Machover, Koppitz (1968) did not adopt the traditional psychoanalytic theory, but took Sullivan's interpersonal relationship theory as the basis of his own research, emphasizing both self psychology and consciousness process. Koppitz said: "In the absence of special requirements for children to draw a whole body of people, children can be guided to examine themselves and their emotions when trying to

grasp the essence of people. The most familiar person of a child is himself, so the person he draws becomes a portrait of his inner self and personal attitude<sup>[4]</sup>.” Koppitz's thought represents a more "reality oriented" point of view, which pays more attention to the analysis of children's current mentality and feelings while analyzing psychological development, interpersonal communication and emotional factors<sup>[5]</sup>.

## 2 The motive of children's painting

How do children produce their own painting behavior? What is the motivation of children's painting? There are many explanations for the study of this problem. The motivation of children's painting is more from: Memory, imagination and real life.

Memory painting refers to children's drawing of recalled objects, figures, animals, environment, *etc.* In fact, whether adults or children, memory painting is not a very easy thing. Because if you want to draw more details, you need some training and encouragement.

Imagination painting, for normal children, can draw what they imagine, such as the image of expressing emotion or the image of fantasizing a story. They can draw unique and interesting content. Gardner points out that some preschool children can start painting (self starter) with little stimulation. Other children are different. When the art materials are presented to them, if adults encourage them to draw, they are more reluctant to draw. This type of children are uncertain about how to draw, uncertain about the self-awareness of the situation, and anxious about the attention of adults. But if you give them a piece of work (*i.e.* an unfinished drawing or pattern) to work on, they were more creative than the self-starters<sup>[6]</sup>.

Painting the observation of objects in the real world. Aside from the teaching of painting skills, older children and teenagers are more interested in this kind of painting. They pay more attention to realistic paintings with real details like photos.

Painting is a very personalized creative work. Parents' evaluation of children's art works will also have an impact on children's desire and motivation for painting. It can be said that the adult's words and actions affect the content, style and quality of children's painting, as well as the ability and interest of children's painting. Secondly, teaching children how to draw also has a great impact on the content and style of children's painting. Finally, social culture will also affect children's painting motivation and attitude towards art activities.

Therefore, how to guide children to draw correctly and stimulate children's interest in painting needs to involve multi-level and multi-dimensional.

## 3 The process and development level of children's painting

In the process of children's psychological guidance, the process of painting and the role of psychological doctors (or psychological counselors, art therapists) are the organic parts of understanding children and children's painting. For children, the painting process also includes physiological, psychological and social factors, which are composed of many factors. These factors include not only the painting materials / tools and environment we know, but also children's painting motivation and development level of painting ability, painting talent and interest, *etc.*

For the interpretation of children's paintings, it's just like swimming. It's not enough to see others swimming. You have to enter the water to fully experience the feeling of swimming. As a teacher, we should first understand the use of some simple painting materials / tools, and pay attention to the layout of the painting environment. Because materials and places are very important parts of the painting process. Robin sums up the importance of painting materials: "If adults take good care of art materials, they can not only make good use of them, but also form a good habit of cherishing them."

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, the development of children's painting generally experienced three stages: Graffiti period, schema period and realism period. Kramer (1971) divides the painting process into five types: Primary graffiti type, emotional vent type, rule-abiding type, painting endorsement type and artistic expression type. In these theories of children's art development, Ron field's <<creation and the growth>> of the mind is described completely. There are six stages in the development of children's art ability: Graffiti period (2-4 years old), pre schema period (4-7 years old), schema period (7-9 years old), realism painting period (9-11 years old), false realism period (11-13 years old), decision period (Adolescence). Here we should be corresponding to the stage content in Piaget's theory of children's cognitive development, which will be helpful for the development of painting education.

The graffiti stage (stage I) corresponds to the later

stage (18 months to 3 years old) of the perceptual movement stage, because children in this stage use actions to think. To some extent, graffiti is a process of large muscle integration and fine movement control. So in the primary stage, children's graffiti is mostly spontaneous. What children like is not necessarily what traces are left on the paper, on the wall or on the book. They prefer the process of painting and the repetition of hands. The lines drawn by children at this stage are not representational. With the gradual progress of painting level, from point, single line, to circular line and circle. It can be said that the development of this stage laid the foundation for the later development of children's painting.

The basic form (stage II), the figure form and the embryonic stage of schema (stage III) correspond to the pre operation stage, and last to about 7 years old. From meaningless representation of graffiti to the process of naming graffiti, this is a development process of the basic form. Imagination is the cornerstone of the development of art ability in this period. The most important development in the embryonic stage of figure form and schema is the development of space concept. Piaget's precomputing period was 4-7 years old, and the concept of self-centered and number began to develop. The most important basic character image in this stage is "tadpole man". Children's discovery of the relationship between painting, thinking and reality in the early stage of schemata promotes the further development of their painting level. From "tadpole man", gradually use various geometric figures to form human body, form various different people, and be able to draw differences between people.

Visual schema stage (stage IV) and realism painting stage (stage V), relative to the specific operation stage (7-12 years old). In this period, children have the concept of conservation. The relatively rapid development of children's painting level is from 6 to 9 years old. From the layout of the picture to the proportion of the structure, it tends to be true. With gradually getting rid of self-centered, children set up to consider other people's feelings, thoughts and views, graphical representation can not meet the needs of children's expression, so children entered the period of realism painting. Since children of this age pay special attention to the perfection of the painting, they are more interested in the details of the object even though the composition

is not so attentive. Children often omit the parts they think are not good because it is difficult to achieve the perfection of realism. Therefore, the later development of his visual ability, the ability of innovative thinking and the ability to connect himself with the environment through personal experience will be hindered. It's a stage that many adults don't go beyond<sup>[7]</sup>. Therefore, children's painting in this stage needs more encouragement and affirmation from teachers, while ridicule and ridicule will make children lose the power of painting and finally give up painting.

The false realism period and decision period correspond to the formal operation period (after 12 years old). This period belongs to adolescence. Teenagers not only take the depiction of characters, animals and environment as part of their conception, but also use these images to symbolize, exchange views and express their thoughts and selves. If there has been relevant painting skills training in the early stage, the art development ability of young children can reach the painting level of adult artists.

#### **4 Special emotion expression in children's paintings**

Children's paintings are often the best reflection of children's inner world, such as depression, anxiety, separation barriers, sexual assault, abuse, domestic violence, social violence, some major events and so on. Whether or not children have experienced pain and crisis, children are likely to express their emotions through painting. There are many different forms of expression of emotional content in painting, which are influenced by many factors including age and background. But we can be sure that the expression of children's painting is a demand for their own health, whether it is happy or sad. Whether it is teachers, families and society, the understanding of children's painting can not only be a one-sided understanding. Painting is not to become an artist, but to become a healthy person, with a sound personality. Therefore, the process of interpreting children's paintings and children's paintings is also the process of communicating with children's hearts. Only by entering children's hearts can we find some content that words cannot express, and we can find answers in paintings.

## References

- [1] Jung, C.G. (1954). *The practice of psychotherapy*. New York: Pantheon.
- [2] Jung, C.G. (1956). *The collected works. Vol. 5. Symbols of transformation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- [3] [USA] Cathy A.M., translated by Li X.Q. (2016). *Children's painting and psychotherapy: interpreting children's painting*. China Light Industry Press, pp. 8.
- [4] Koppitz, L.P. (1968). *Art therapists exhibiting children's art: When, Where, and why*. *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, 13(3), pp. 205-207.
- [5] [USA] Cathy A.M., translated by Li X.Q. (2016). *Children's painting and psychotherapy: interpreting children's painting*. China Light Industry Press, pp. 9.
- [6] Gardner, H. (1982). *Art, mind, and brain*. New York: Basic Books.
- [7] Lindstrom, M. (1957). *Children's art: A study of normal development in children's mode of visualization*. Berkeley: University of California Press.