



Children's Diary Drawings and Their Inner Voice

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Children's Diary Drawings and Their Inner Voice

Diary drawing is a form of emotional expression for children. Through original art, children can illustrate their inner worlds directly and purely as they capture their feelings and perceptions about

their everyday lives. It also provides a bridge for

adults to connect with children and a tool for learning more about children's emotional and psychological needs and development.

As a children's art educator, I appreciate how young children are willing to share with peers, teachers, and parents, especially when they feel a sense of achievement

and joy from their drawings. New concepts and ideas are gained during the sharing process, benefiting children's knowledge and cognition construction. What's more, when children depict their daily lives in their creations, at first symbolically, instructors and parents can offer guidance that helps improve their understanding of details and meanings related to their surroundings. At the same time, their cultural identity and belonging will develop.

Active Artistic Expression and Meaning-Making Through Diary Drawing

The scribbles and improvisations that children make in daily life can be considered "diary drawings."

Children express their ideas with the help of diagrams, symbols, colors, words, and other elements. These images can represent reproduction of objects, expressions of emotion, original stories, etc. These "diary" entries can be in the form of traditional drawing, as well as collages, paper cutting, modeling, and other artistic forms. As children's minds mature and their cognitive levels continue to improve, they will acquire unique methods and insights into diary drawing as an important part of their aesthetic education.

Diary drawing is also a way for children to engage actively in artistic creation. John Dewey emphasized the value of "learning by doing" as students gain knowledge

through direct experiences and interactions with their environment. Availability of different materials and use of various settings enhances children's motivation and interest. Young children will achieve satisfaction from the freedom to create regular drawings that combine their thoughts, experiences, and reflections. As they draw, they are fostering their creativity and individuality, thinking critically about their actions, problem-solving, and cultivating deeper understanding through creative expression.

Developing Diary Drawings in the Classroom

Even though many children have the habit of drawing, some specific guidance can help them build better drawing confidence and artistic literacy.

- **Affirm children's drawings and give them confidence.** Every child is an artist, with the right to choose how they express themselves artistically. Whether using simple lines, symbols, or graffiti on discarded paper, their

What Does Research Tell Us?

- Anning and Ring¹ discuss the importance of children's drawings as a means of communication and expression, presenting case studies and examples that highlight social and cultural influences on children's artmaking.
- Restoy et al.'s study² also explores how physical and socio-cultural contexts affect the complexity, content, and representation of human figures in children's drawings.
- Studies by Ballús et al.³ highlight that graphic emotional indicators expressed in children's drawings are often associated with experiences of abuse and maltreatment, supporting the usefulness of drawing human figures in identifying children at risk of victimization.
- Soundy⁴ examines how children's drawings can provide complex insights into their thoughts, emotions, and world understanding through symbols, revealing their inner world and developmental stage. She encourages teachers to engage in conversations with children about their artwork to uncover meanings behind the images.
- Tay-Lim and Lim⁵ also emphasize how young children share their thoughts and feelings through drawing, which is a natural and accessible form of communication for children that allows them to express complex ideas. They advocate a co-construction process whereby children actively collaborate with their teachers.
- Paquette et al.⁶ explore how primary students' drawings and oral language can be used to enhance their understanding of expository texts and identify improvement in students' reading and listening comprehension of terminology, facts, and principles on a particular topic by evaluating "before" and "after" artwork.

expressions should be respected and praised. Provide ample opportunities for children to express themselves, display and discuss their work often, and be

patient in listening to children as they narrate their images.

Figure 1 is a travelogue by a 7-year-old child. She uses simple lines,

Figure 1. My travel notes.



Figure 2. Children's amusement park.



general visual symbols, and bright colors to depict the scenes of taking a train, visiting a shipyard, and going to the beach, expressing her anticipation for a journey and the happiness of playing.

- **Encourage children to practice drawing in a diary to record life and express emotions.** Teachers can share with parents the benefits of diary drawing, encouraging them to provide drawing tools and paper for children. A growth log can be supportive, recording the following elements:

- A life diary that encourages children to record interesting things and make observations through artistic language.

- Sketching practice, using familiar things in the environment (e.g., vases, plants, buildings, people) as sketching objects, improves students' observation and modeling abilities and helps accumulate drawing materials and artistic inspiration.
- Creative association when children brainstorm and focus on cultivating divergent thinking and creativity.
- Storybook creation with their parents; children create the drawings independently and parents help with binding and other tasks. This activity promotes the integrity of children's artistic language expression and

cultivates logical reasoning, collaboration, and problem-solving abilities.

The diary drawing in Figure 2 shows an amusement park. The picture elements include a ticket seller in a ticket office, children lining up to get in, a little girl taking photos, children on rides, birds feeding their babies in a nest, and green trees in the distance. This picture reflects the student's keen observational ability and her perceptions about life. In my communication with this student, I learned she often carries a diary and drawing materials. She uses drawing to record her experiences and express her feelings. Her parents affirm each of her works and unconditionally support her artistic creation. From the color expression in her pictures, we can feel warmth and joy, just like the

girl's gentle and generous personality. A good picture can move people's hearts and demonstrate personal charm. Good drawing habits can improve students' modeling ability, aesthetic ability, and perceptions, training their ability to capture life and innovatively express themselves with color and vitality.

Figure 3 shows how a little boy used naive and childlike lines to depict a terracotta warrior. Intuitive artistic expression allows students to experience and understand historical sculpture and architecture on a deeper level. This can help children develop cultural identity and establish their subjectivity.

Figure 3. Sketch of a terracotta warrior.



国庆节期间，我去看了兵马俑

The diary drawing in Figure 4 is a free creative creation by a 6-year-old girl. "The Story of a Cup of Drink" shows a group of small animals scratching their heads anxiously because they don't know how much money to spend to buy drinks. She applied knowledge of currency from math lessons to create this diary drawing. The ideas are bold, and the elements are rich. She used watercolor pens to create lively and interesting images of the animals.

- **Integrate teaching content with diary drawing creation.**

It is helpful to integrate forms familiar to children into an art course and focus on the connection of knowledge to the progression of children's psychological development. Encourage children to try new materials, constantly create new content, and improve their cognitive ability and healthy psychological development through constant connection, reconstruction, thinking, and creation.

Practical Tips for Parents

Some parents still have misunderstandings or stereotypes about the development of children's arts education. For example, they may have unrealistic expectations, pay too much attention to the product, and ignore the children's participation process. They don't understand how diary drawings can train children's image portrayal ability and cultivate good drawing habits because many of these drawings are incomplete.

Another misunderstanding is that parents think they need professional art knowledge. They don't think they can teach their children if they cannot draw themselves

often create a very conceptual image of a tree. In real life, the shapes of trees are varied and ever-changing. Developing the habit of observation will help students note and reflect these differences. Parents can choose different trees and guide their children in comparing them and analyzing the differences. With this guidance, children will also create more vividly and deeply as they pay more attention to what they observe. At the same time, parents will have a deeper understanding of their children as they communicate about what they observe and create.

Potential Benefits of Diary Drawings for Young Children

- **Active engagement in art-making.** When diary drawing becomes a habit, it stimulates children to participate in artistic activities actively and often. Their desire to express themselves grows and they seek to enrich their creations. As time goes by, students gain sensitivity to colors, shapes, and lines, and they develop a unique style and muscle memory for depicting scenarios and details. Children will be excited when they learn new things and will be eager to express them through drawing. They will observe things from multiple angles and even use their imagination to create new forms. They find that drawing a diary is an outlet for making meaning of their life experiences and growth journey.
- **Increased confidence through artistic creation.** Some students exhibit closed thinking and weak expression abilities when first given the freedom to create. They

hesitate to be bold, due to a fear of making mistakes and are reluctant to start drawing. Some students' work lacks substance, and their concepts appear monotonous. However, when diary drawings are immersed in daily life, the continuous accumulation of materials, elements, and ideas will lead to significant qualitative improvements. Observation skills are also enhanced during the process. Children will naturally use the accumulated drawing materials and experiences, leading to a more effortless and enriched creative process.

- **Cognitive development and critical thinking.** Diary drawing is a dynamic and subjective behavior; children combine their past knowledge with new thoughts and ideas to create new images, which requires endless thinking about and memorizing of the shapes they want to create. As a result, this process contributes to new concepts and knowledge. They explore their potential to depict complicated subject matter under their parents' and instructors' guidance. Generally, the journey of creating art requires children to use their independent thinking and problem-solving ability to express their inner worlds and achieve their drawing goals.
- **Language expression and communication skills.** For young children who lack verbal expression ability, combining images and words is a practical way to promote language skills. When children interact with peers, parents, or instructors based on their diary drawings, they need to think about how to convey information. This

process also provides parents and instructors with a platform to understand children's intentions and what is needed to help them develop in a healthy environment.

- **Enriched inner world and personality growth.** Diary drawing is a process of establishing self-dialogue and self-reflection. Children will better understand themselves as they draw and develop ideas. Children will think about how to solve problems and how to grow and improve. The multi-sensory nature of artistic creation drives children to express their emotions, which will help them develop their personality and cultivate a positive attitude and values toward life.
- **Enhanced inclusiveness and cultural confidence.** When exposed to different cultures, experiences, and objects, they will become more tolerant of the world and more willing to try new things. When children are exposed to ancient buildings and classic books, for example, they will better understand the culture and region to which they belong. As they create diary drawings inspired by such experiences, they will have a stronger sense of cultural identity and belonging, which is a social imprint that affects their growth.

Conclusion

Diary drawings are a powerful tool that allow children to express their emotions and inner worlds. Through this form of artistic expression, children communicate their feelings and experiences in a way that words often cannot. The process not only aids cognitive development but also

enhances parent-child relationships and encourages development of observational skills. By integrating different mediums and encouraging continuous practice, children develop creativity, critical thinking, and a deeper cultural identity, ultimately enriching their personal growth and learning journeys.

Notes:

¹ Anning, A., & Ring, K. (2004). *Making sense of children's drawings*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).

² Restoy, S., Martinet, L., Sueur, C., & Pelé, M. (2022). Draw yourself: How culture influences drawings by children between the ages of two and fifteen. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, 940617.

³ Ballús, E., Comelles, C., Pasto, M. T., & Benedico, P. (2023). Children's drawings as a projective tool to explore and prevent experiences of mistreatment and/or sexual abuse. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14.

⁴ Soundy, C. S. (2012). Searching for deeper meaning in children's drawings. *Childhood Education*, 88(1), 45-51.

⁵ Tay-Lim, J., & Lim, S. (2013). Privileging younger children's voices

in research: Use of drawings and a co-construction process. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 12(1), 65-83.

⁶ Paquette, K. R., Fello, S. E., & Jalongo, M. R. (2007). The talking drawings strategy: Using primary children's illustrations and oral language to improve comprehension of expository text. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 35, 65-73.

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A New Vision for High-Quality Preschool Curriculum



Edited by Sue Bredekamp, Linda Espinosa, Rebekah Hutton, and Amy Stephens

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine convened a committee of experts to conduct a comprehensive study of preschool curriculum quality for children from ages 3 to 5, with special attention to the needs of Black and Latine children, multilingual learners, children with disabilities, and children experiencing poverty in the United States. The committee's report, *A New Vision for High-Quality Preschool Curriculum*, articulates a vision for high-quality preschool curricula for all children, grounded in equity and justice-oriented principles from inception to implementation and evaluation.

The committee's vision for developing high-quality preschool curricula considers the learning experiences that each child has access to, the varied opportunities to experience engaging content that can spark their curiosity and desire to learn, and the ways in which learning can be adapted to support the child and their individual needs.

Their findings indicate that a high-quality preschool curriculum should:

- Incorporate the perspectives, experiences, cultures, languages, strengths, and needs of a diverse range of children, families, and workforce settings
- Include rich and meaningful content that centers child engagement and agency
- Include well-designed learning experiences, intentional responsive teaching strategies, well-defined objectives and outcomes, embedded formative assessments and differentiation based on understanding children's ability levels, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, interests, and dispositions
- Have a scope and sequence that follows children's ways of thinking and learning with research-validated learning trajectories, are culturally and linguistically affirming, and include effective supports for children with disabilities
- Demonstrate effectiveness in yielding positive school and life outcomes for the children and families they are intended to reach.

<https://www.nationalacademies.org/our-work/a-new-vision-for-high-quality-pre-k-curriculum>





The Mikhulu Trust is a South African non-profit organization that focuses on early childhood development, particularly through the promotion of shared reading practices between caregivers and young children. The trust aims to improve the cognitive and socio-emotional development of children by encouraging parents and caregivers to engage in interactive book-sharing sessions with their children.

The Mikhulu Trust operates primarily in under-resourced communities where access to educational materials and early learning opportunities is limited. The organization's programs are designed to be accessible and culturally relevant, often using locally produced picture books that resonate with the experiences and environments of the children and their families.

Book-Sharing Program

The cornerstone of the Mikhulu Trust's efforts is its Book-Sharing Program, which trains caregivers — such as parents, grandparents, and childcare providers — in interactive book-sharing techniques. This program emphasizes a dialogic approach to reading, where caregivers engage children by asking questions, encouraging predictions, and discussing the story. The aim is to create a more enriching and interactive reading experience, which can significantly boost a child's language, cognitive, and social-emotional development.

Impact: Research has shown that children who participate in these shared reading sessions demonstrate improved vocabulary, better listening and comprehension skills, and enhanced emotional regulation. The program also strengthens the bond between children and their caregivers, fostering a nurturing environment that supports overall child development.

Community-Based Training

The Mikhulu Trust offers community-based training sessions where local facilitators are trained to conduct book-sharing workshops within their communities. These facilitators are equipped with the skills and materials needed to lead groups of caregivers in understanding and practicing effective book-sharing techniques.

Impact: By training local facilitators, the Mikhulu Trust ensures that the knowledge and skills required for effective book-sharing are sustained within the



community. This approach has a multiplying effect, as trained facilitators continue to teach others, expanding the reach and impact of the program.

Culturally Relevant Picture Books

The trust develops and distributes culturally relevant picture books that are tailored to the experiences and environments of the children in the communities they serve. These books often feature familiar settings, characters, and themes that resonate with the children, making the reading experience more engaging and meaningful.

Impact: Providing culturally relevant materials helps ensure that children see themselves and their lives reflected in the stories they read, which can boost self-esteem and cultural pride. It also makes the book-sharing experience more accessible and relatable for both children and caregivers.

Research and Advocacy

The Mikhulu Trust conducts research to continually assess the effectiveness of its programs and to advocate for the importance of early childhood development and shared reading practices. This research is used to inform public policy and to raise awareness about the critical role of early learning in a child's development.

Impact: The trust's advocacy efforts have contributed to a broader understanding and recognition of the importance of early childhood development in South Africa. Their research findings have been used to influence policy decisions and to promote greater investment in early learning initiatives.

<https://mikhulustrust.org>