

# Developmental Stages of Children Art: A Historical Perspective and its Implications for Today's Elementary Art Education Programme

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## Abstract

*The present study aims to provide a brief description of the child art studies. For this purpose the paper analyzes the contributions of philosophers, psychologists and art educationists in (1) providing favorable climate for progression of art education and (2) evolutionary process of developmental stages of child's artistic growth. The paper also aims to present a brief analysis of art education in Peshawar, Pakistan and draws out some important suggestions based on the child's interest and stages of artistic development to plan elementary art education.*

**Keywords:** *child art, artistic development, artistic growth, art education*

## Introduction

It was late in the nineteenth century when the philosophers and psychologists in Europe noticed children, scribbling and creating images on the walls. This marked the beginning of the child art which at first was considered as part of their play but later the drawings were purposefully collected and analyzed to understand their perception of the world (Chishti, 2015; Hurwitz & Day 2001). The study of child art was generated initially from the Child Study Movement in 1883 as a secondary finding of the movement. The movement was based on examining evolutionary patterns of child progression and to bring a change in traditional art teaching method being practiced in schools (Richards, 1974-1975; Hurwitz & Day, 2001). The findings of the movement revealed that a child's artistic growth progresses through different developmental stages just like his physical or

other growths. After this discovery various studies were conducted to observe the characteristics of child art.

## **Background**

Arlene E. Richards in his lectures (1974-1975) described various philosophers, psychologists and art educationists who were responsible for recognizing the importance of child art and developmental stages of child's artistic growth. Hurwitz & Day (2001) also mention the contributions of these eminent scholars in understanding the importance of child art and in recognizing the fact that it is a mind activity and that schools should be focused on child-centred art programs.

## **Aims of the Study**

The study of Richards provides a detailed account of child art studies in chronological order and documented the child's art progression from the year 1857 to 1921. However, these lectures do not mention the contributions of some other renowned persons after 1921, such as Viktor Lowenfeld and others. Therefore, the present study aims to provide a historical perspective of the progression of child art study from its beginning from the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century to the late-20<sup>th</sup> century specifically when in 1947 Lowenfeld presented his most acceptable theory of artistic developmental stages. For this purpose the paper provides an analysis of contributions of philosophers, psychologists and art educationists in (1) providing favourable climate for progression of art education and (2) evolutionary process of developmental stages of artistic growth. The study also focuses on its implications for today's art education program in the Country. For this, paper also presents a brief analysis of art education in Pakistan and draws out some implications based on the study findings for policy makers, teachers and care takers to plan an appropriate art curriculum.

## Historical Background

### **Influencing factors for favourable climate**

Initially the philosophy of Jean-Jacque Rousseau (1712-1778) and John Dewey (1916-1966) influenced the child-education (Kelly, 2004). They presented a concept that children have their own feelings and thought process which should be supported (Dewey, 1934). They both agreed that children should be allowed to learn through self-initiated activities (Brown, 2006; Chishti, 2015; Chishti et al. 2016; Dewey, 1934; Hurwitz & Day, 2001). Another great influence came from the field of psychology. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> through early 20<sup>th</sup> century G. Stanley Hall and other psychologist launched the child study movement and introduced the term creativity (Richards, 1974-75; Brown 2001). It was in this period that the educators and psychologist started studying children drawing as evidence of psychological states. Self-expression and creativity were highly appreciated and encouraged and practiced in art education (Eisner, 1994; Kelly, 2004).

According to Kelly (2004) Piagetian theory of cognitive psychology (1964) has had a great impact on the psychological studies of child art. Piaget (1955) believed that the relationship of children with art is purely based on their ability to understand the permanent existence of objects. Lack of such understanding will prevent them from evoking the past and anticipating the future as they will have no image to help them move on. In order to recall what is not there and to think about it, they require a schema (a diagrammatic presentation). These schemas help human mind to organize their experiences and understand them. Piaget's different stages of development gained extensive attention in child education and cognitive development. He believed that teachers, need to design different environments and interact with children to bring out their creative, inventive and critical thinking (Chishti, 2015; Kelly, 2004). Other psychological theory such as Cole's psychoanalytic theory (1960) stated that child art was a reflection of his deep inner emotions, feelings, and inner psychological drives. For example, fathers were usually drawn tall because emotionally children believe them to be powerful and dominating (Cole, 1960). These philosophical and psychological theories not only attracted the attention towards the importance of children's art, emotions, and self-expressions but also facilitated the concept of child-centered art

education therefore, served as environmental factors and provided a favorable climate for further studies and progression of child art (Chishti et al., 2016; Richards, 1974-1975).

### **Developmental Stages of Child Art**

During the child study movement (1883), Hall conducted a child study in which children's drawings were collected and analyzed. In these drawings, he observed the development of the human figure. Based on these observations, Hall suggested six developmental stages. He noted that the drawings progress in following stages: (1) random marks to (2) simple circle for head (3) head joined by single lines for limbs and arms (3) addition of face features (4) arms extended from head (5) body represented and (6) finally a dressed figure appeared with transparent clothes (Richards 1975-1976). From these findings Hall suggested the role of the adults and school programs to make children understand their environment. His study contributed in understanding and recognizing child art, child psychology and importance of child hood (Heilig et al., 2010).

The child study movement of Hall laid a ground for further studies of child art and a plea to bring a change in art education programs initiated. The prominent figures who struggled for the advocacy of art education and argued for the need of change were Spencer, Cooke, Frenz Cizek, Barnes, Herrick, Lukens, and Kerschensteiner. In (1886) Ebenezer Cooke suggested to change the teaching method of the art. He recommended that observations of children drawings can help to develop art program that would maximum benefit the children. He described four developmental stages in child art and pointed out that children draw from their imaginations (Hurwitz 2001; Richards, 1974-1975). Before that, in 1861 Herbert Spencer had already studied children drawing as artists (Kelly, 2004). He recognized the early scribbles of a child as a development of his other abilities (such as motor development and kinesthetic intelligence). His theory defined that (1) every living thing grows and develops through a simple to complex process; (2) art should be stimulated from early years of life and (3) copy models or predetermined art (e.g. color-in images) should be strictly avoided as it develops the habit of imitation and inhibit the child's creativity (Brown, 2001; Kelly, 2004; Peers,

2002; Richards, 1974-1975). The writings of Spencer influenced James Sully and in 1896 he presented three stages of artistic development after scientific observation of children's drawings. He was the first to use the term *schema*. He opined that although children art was not up to the adult's standards but their art should not be looked as immature. Some important findings of his research included: (1) exaggerated images of important people or parts of objects and (2) children drawing should not be evaluated according to the adult standards (Kelly, 20004). The reason is that as children can't behave like adults, similarly they can't draw like adults. Other researchers like Ricci (1887) and Earl Barnes (1893) concluded their studies that (1) children draw human schema at first, (2) show movements and (3) draw objects in transparent manner. In 1896 Lukens conducted a study. He was interested in the subject matter of children drawings. He concluded his study with suggestions like children should let to draw the subject matters of their own choices and interest.

Franz Cizek the 'reformer of art education' began the Child Art Movement in Vienna in 1897 (Hurwitz & Day, 2001). He was the first to introduce the term 'child art' in the 1890s. He was an art teacher as well and established the first Art Academy for juvenile children in Vienna. Franz Cizek described the age of three to seven as the age of purest art. He opined that children have their own values and they should be given free hand to draw what they feel. The adults should not interfere with their mode of self-expression. The encouragement of their self-expression would bring diversity in their subject matters and work of art (Richards 1974-1975). In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Burke also stressed the child's self-expression. He agreed with Cook, and Barnes that a child was interested in expressing his own ideas rather than copying the stereotyped geometrical shapes and forms. For him human figure was most important because of his first recognition with 'I', as his own self (Lowenfeld, 1954).

Those researchers whose primary interest was the stages through which a child progress in his artistic development, were Sully, Partridge, Kerchensteiner, Stern, Luquet, Rouma, Buhler, Cole, Read and Lowenfeld (Kelly, 2004; Richards, 1974-75). However, the most lasting and significant descriptions of 'children's artistic development was provided by Viktor Lowenfeld in the book, '*Creative and Mental Growth*' (1947). Lowenfeld (1954) put emphasis on the individuality of the child and suggested self-directed approach. He

was mainly concerned with different aptitudes of expressions working behind visual images (Kelly, 2004). In 1947 he illustrated six stages of children's artistic development in his book which was most widely used in the field of art education. He described these *stages* according to the child's age and characteristics of drawings. :

1. *Scribbling (2-4 years)*: (1) creation of uncontrolled marks due to lack of motor control, (2) control scribbling and (3) naming the scribbles (fig. 1).
2. *Pre-schematic (4-7 years)*: conscious creation of images; floating images; representation of human figure with circle for head and single lines for limbs (fig. 2)
3. *Schematic (7-9 years)*: identified schema, awareness of space concept; using bottom of the page as a base line and top as a sky line; relationships among objects becomes apparent; parts of objects are exaggerated according to its importance to the child (fig. 3).
4. *Gang age (9-12 years)*: self-awareness and self-criticism becomes apparent; idea of perspective and overlapping of objects becomes apparent as the concept of space develops; forms become more elaborate than previous; children start to hide their drawings if fear of lack of drawing ability develops (fig. 4).
5. *Pseudo-naturalistic stage (12-14 years)*: children strive to draw like adults; more conscious about naturalistic drawing; shading appears; concerned more about the accuracy of drawing objects; idea of space division and proportion becomes strong (fig. 5).
6. *Adolescent art (14 – 17 years)*: art becomes conscious effort. It is the time when a teenager decides to quit art or continues making art as a mean of self-expression (fig 6).

Lowenfeld's study influenced others as well to further study the child art and based on his idea of artistic development many others conducted researches in the same field. Such as Mendelowitz (1953) proposed 4 stages of similar characteristics. Read, in 1956 categorized children's drawing into 12 developmental stages. Later on Kellogg (1969) presented six further categories of scribbling or first stage of artistic development. In 1979 Betty Edwards concluded same developmental stages into four. Hurwitz & Day (1991) in the Book *Children and their art: Methods for the elementary school* described

the artistic development into three major stages. In later years, the works of Horward Gardner (1978), Judith Burton (1980) and Duncum (1993) also contributed to research area of child art. All these scholars agreed with Lowenfeld ideology that children are born artists and should be given freedom of self-expression, be allowed to progress naturally through their artistic developmental stages and the teacher should be concerned to satisfy the needs of every single child (Brown, 2006; Cole, 1960).

### **Findings of the study**

The philosophers, psychologists and art educationists made a great deal in the evolutionary process of artistic developmental stages during the Child Study Movement in 1883. Afterwards the Child Art Movement was started by Franz Cizek. His philosophy further influenced Sully, Kerchensteiner, Buhler, Lowenfeld, Hurwitz and Day and others. They spent their quality time observing children at art, studying their drawings and analysing their thoughts and self-expressions through their schemas and subject matters. They noticed that when a child grows his drawings develop from simple to complex and from haphazard placement of objects on the paper to organized manner to more elaborate forms. They were among those who studied the subject matter of children's drawings in detail. Through their extensive studies of child art they concluded that every child has artistic growth and he progress through it in different developmental stages. In-short, in the light of above studies the present paper put forward some major findings:

1. Every young child regardless of race, region and religion passes through an artistic developmental stages.
2. His artistic growth progresses naturally just like his physical, emotional and mental growths.
3. A child learns to draw from simple to complex shapes to more elaborate forms.
4. He draws spontaneously through his imaginations and any hindrance in this way of self-expression or discouragement may freeze his artistic growth at early age of life.
5. He draws his own choice of subject matter therefore he starts with a symbol of man as a sense of self-identification with 'I'.
6. For a child drawing is a language than a visual art.

## **Art education in Pakistan**

After reviewing the studies related to the stages of child's artistic development and concluding the findings the question here is that *can schools play their role in nourishing this type of growth and help the child in attaining a healthy artistic development just like his physical, mental and emotional growth?* Before proceeding to answer this question let's have a look into art education in the Country. According to a study by Vandal (2004) more than 85%, of schools in Pakistan are Government owned schools financed by federal, provincial government or other stock holders. Ironically, government and semi government schools have no art education in their curriculum therefore children experience visual arts and aesthetics very often within the school settings (Chishti, 2015; Vandal, 2004). Vandal (2004) further described that "the National Policy for school education (government schools) is somewhat silent on art education and strong on character building and moral improvement" (p.1).

As far as private schools are concerned, they do have art program as a part of their curriculum but very few of them such as the oxford or Cambridge Schools system offer a child-centred art program. A survey by Chishti (2015) revealed that many private schools funded by the local bodies practice stereotype teaching in art class room and they are mostly teacher-centred. Lack of professional and quality art-teachers is another issue which needs attention to be solved (Vandal, 2004). However, on-job trainings particularly in the domain of art education can overcome this problem. The study raised a question that *'can schools play their role in nourishing the artistic growth and help the child in attaining a healthy artistic development just like his physical, mental and emotional growth?'* In 2015 a comparative study by Chishti was conducted to investigate the impact of elementary art education on children's creativity in the schools of Peshawar, Pakistan. The study findings concluded that the art students scored significantly higher as compared to the non-art students. The previous research finding support the answer of the present study that 'yes' schools can and should play a vital role in this type of growth to best benefit the children.

In account of the present research findings mentioned earlier the paper also draws some implications for schools, teachers and policy makers based on the child's artistic development:

1. The art program should be child-centered rather than the teacher-centered.
2. The subject matter for an art activity should be based on the child's interest rather than predetermined art.
3. Children at elementary level should be allowed to draw by their own imaginations and their self-expression should be encouraged.
4. The artistic developmental stages should be given due importance.
5. Policy makers, educationists and art teachers should be trained accordingly to recognize the stages of artistic development in order to develop a relevant curriculum to best benefit the children.
6. Children should not be forced to copy models or images otherwise the act could develop the habit of imitating rather than to enhance their imagination and creativity.
7. The art curriculum should be based on the philosophy of art education; it's meaning for children and according to the stages of development so that their art can naturally progress.
8. Child art should not be evaluated on adult standards or as other formal subjects instead every art work should be praised to encourage child's creativity and self-expression.
9. Teachers should be concerned about every single child in their art class.
10. Trained art teachers should be hired to facilitate and guide the child art.
11. Every child should be given equal opportunity to have formal art education at school.

## **Conclusion**

Children art is universal and their art progresses through different developmental stages. However, there is a dire need to understand this natural phenomenon of artistic growth. The matter of understanding is that the child art is not just making simple marks, lines and meaningless schema but actually representing his feelings, thoughts and expressions. His spontaneous drawings give us his insight and conveying us a lot about his emotional, physical as well as mental growth. In this regard we as adults should be conscious about the fact that by not knowing or ignoring this natural phenomenon we may responsible for freezing his artistic development which is vital and natural; may accountable for snatching the ideal time when creativity has a chance to be fully flourished and letting

his artistic growth mal-nourished by not providing him a favorable environment. For a child the process of making art is as natural as he speaks with words, tells us his worries with tears and shares his joy with smile. It is important to understand that this is the child right to be given freedom of self-expression through artistic ability which is innate and according to the laws of human nature and development. We adults as policy makers, educators, teachers, parents and caretakers can play their role to make early years of life joy full and beneficial for all types of development whether its' physical, social, mental, emotional or artistic.

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## Figures

### Illustrations of Developmental Stages of Children Drawings



Figure 1

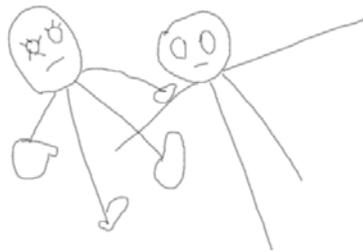


Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

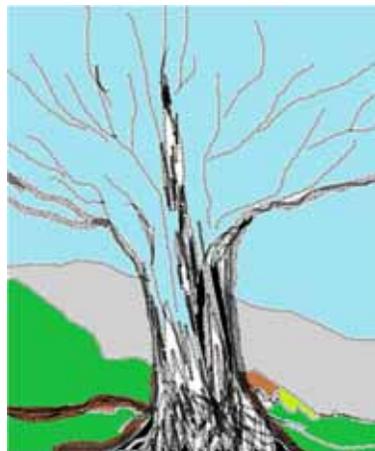


Figure 5



Figure 6