

Children's Drawings, as A Domain of Exercise of the Semiotic Function and Its Aesthetic Appreciation*

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Introduction

In this study, the importance of drawing, which is one of the semiotic function areas of communication in children, the aesthetic aspects of drawings, and how children communicate through drawing will be discussed.

Children communicate with their environment in many ways. Apart from communication with language, they try to express themselves through their behaviors, games, and music. Another way of communication is painting. Children's drawings are signs of the child's relationship with the objective world and the productive action towards changing that environment (Savaş, 2016:13). Piaget saw drawing as an effort to represent the outside world, so he considered drawings as the emergence of mental images. Children also communicate with those around them through their drawings. They translate their imagination into reality through pictures. Pictures, which are a simple means of expression, are of great importance in helping the child reflect himself and express his feelings and thoughts about events (Yavuzer, 1995: 5).

Children, often before mastering written language, employ symbols to represent their understanding of the world. A stick figure might not just

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represent a person but could embody someone specific—a friend, a family member, or themselves. The choice of colors, shapes, and sizes carries meaning, reflecting their cognitive and emotional development.

As a communication tool or a sign mediating communication, painting or drawing reveals a semiotic function. Because, as Lehalle and Melier pointed out in 2021, it is possible to understand what the paintings are telling and what they mean through both the planes of reference and inference. Therefore, painting or art activity is a unique environment and opportunity that opens the door to the child's world.

The picture can also be a sign of the child's mental development, in which he conveys his inner world. His drawings are a guide for following the child's thoughts and mental development. Thanks to the picture, which looks like an ordinary activity in daily life, maybe a game, very important information about the child can be obtained. It is not easy to make sense of lines that seem complicated at first glance (Köseoğlu, 2023, 138). However, drawings, which contain much more information than they seem, allow us to discover the invisible part of the iceberg by reflecting how the child perceives his environment, his relationship with the outside world, the bond between him and adults, and his problems, if any. In other words, the child visualizes his impressions of the outside world, which he perceives by watching, hearing, and touching, through the form of expression of his feelings, thoughts, and imagination (Savaş, 2016,13).

There are many studies in the literature on drawing development. These studies were discussed in Yavuzer 1995, and leading or pioneering names include Goodenough, Luquet, Piaget, Lurçat, McCarthy, Prudhommeau, Naville, Pernoud and Lowenfeld. Apart from these, the works of Chateau (2008), Pavel (2018) and Subes (2018) on semiotics and aesthetics are also noteworthy.

Historically, it can be seen that children's drawing, which was the subject of educational, philosophical, and then psychological analysis in the 20th century, influenced those working in these fields at the beginning of the 20th century. As art historian Emmanuel Pernoud shows in *The*

Invention of Children's Drawing (2015), this was a period when art was considered sacred and led to the recognition of children's drawings as art in their own right. According to the author, the drawings were fascinating because they knew no boundaries, and "formlessness is actually a form that escapes our attention." For this reason, many artists at that time collected children's drawings and made collections, and they were considered as rediscovered works in which it was possible to transfer everything to drawing because it knew no boundaries (Lesauvage, 2021).

In order to determine the stages of development of children's drawings, researchers such as Kerschensteiner, Rouma, and Luquet examined thousands of pictures they collected. In 2021, Lehalle and Melier argues that graphic activity begins before the semiotic function in the child. In fact, leaving a trace on a support first corresponds to a sensorimotor exercise without representative intention. The drawing movement consists of drawing random circles and lines on paper or another object (Lehalle and Melier, 2021, 18).

Luquet examined children's drawings from an early age and later identified the stages that would contribute to Piaget's work. In his study in 1927, he listed the developmental stages of children's drawing as follows:

1. Pure scribbling,
2. Interpretive scribbling,
3. Failed realism,
4. Mental realism
5. Visual realism. (Yavuzer, 1995, 25)

From the age of 18 months onwards, the drawing phase is the pure scribbling phase. In this stage, the child draws random lines on the paper. In the beginning, since the child does not have enough hand and finger strength, he/she cannot hold the pencil properly, and the drawings are haphazard. These lines are initially uncontrolled and meaningless; this is a discovery for the child, an accomplished action. The child attributes his own meanings to the lines. The accomplished action shows a desire to continue, and this action is repeated until it becomes a skill and becomes

a pleasure.

However, over time, with mental development, hand-eye coordination and control improve and the drawings begin to make sense, the child attributes meanings to his/her drawings. But their interpretations are incidental. This stage constitutes the Interpretive Scribbling stage.

Interpretive scribbles begin at the age of 3-4. At this stage, the drawings take certain forms. The child succeeds in drawing circles, notices the shapes he makes, and begins to explore them. He comments on his drawings over time. At this stage, the semiotic function reveals itself. Because when the child interprets his drawings, he tells them what they are and what they represent. He notices the details of objects and tries to convey them with his lines. Towards the end of this period, primitive depictions appear in children's paintings. The child now begins to examine the parts of the objects and transfer them to his drawing. The first figure that stands out in this period is the human figure, but this figure is quite simple and incomplete.

Although the child starts drawing determinedly around the age of 5, drawing disjointed lines and not being able to form a whole is an indication of the "Failed Realism" phase. A child who starts making representative drawings sometimes cannot combine the parts of the drawing. For example, he can draw eyes or arms outside the body. Human figures in the form of stick men, as well as figures with cephalopods and arms, are also noteworthy. The face is usually drawn from a front profile and expressionless. Hands; It can be fingered or fingerless. In some examples, it is seen that the body part is exaggerated. As age progresses, the neck, fingers, ears, and pupils are added to the picture. The ratio between body parts varies and becomes more realistic. The child does not try to draw the object exactly. House drawings are noticeable during this period.

The fourth stage identified by Luquet is the "Mental Reality stage". This period is also called the pre-scheme period. It generally covers the age after five years. Starting from this age, children begin to draw what they know, not what they see, and to convey whatever is in their minds.

In this respect, children's drawings give adults an idea about the child's thoughts, feelings and how they perceive the environment. This is a period when the child's emotions are more dominant. The figures depicted are understandable, but the size of the objects and their connection with the space are weak. The child may exaggerate details that are important to him/her. At this age, he deals with symbols and, over time, begins to see the difference between the real appearance of things and his own schemas. Since the child in this period does not pay attention to the direction and the relationship between objects, he may draw some figures upside down. Gradually, symbolic images reveal themselves. In order to make sense of such pictures, it may be necessary to ask the child what he is drawing or ask him to explain (Abacı, 2010).

The last stage, Visual Realism, is the period in which the child draws what he or she sees from his or her own point of view and covers ages eight and above. The pictures become more detailed and realistic. Colors are no longer chosen randomly; the child wants to color objects in their true colors. At this stage, the concept of space stands out in the paintings. While the previously drawn figures appeared to be flying in the air, they are now positioned spatially on a certain ground. The human figure becomes more proportionate, realistic, and abundantly detailed. The child begins to show gender discrimination in his drawings starting at the age of 6 – 8 (Kelleveziroğlu, 2020).

Apart from this, Yavuzer quotes Kellog in 1995 and mentions that the child's pleasure in painting is divided into two as "motor" and "visual" pleasure. Accordingly, the child's first scribbles express his motor pleasure, and the satisfaction he feels while looking at the scribbles expresses his visual pleasure. Children first try to paint interesting basic forms, and no matter what culture the children come from, their paintings include circles, crosses and simple shapes, says Kellog, who talks about the existence of an innate universal order in children's paintings. From this point of view, artistically, children's paintings are divided into three, according to him.

1. Basic scribbles

2. Placement patterns

3. Diagrams

Usually, towards the age of two, meaningless basic scribbles are replaced by proportional drawings that take into account the boundaries of the paper on which the picture is drawn. At the age of three, he begins to draw shapes such as circles and triangles. The beginning of circular drawings leads to the development of the child's perception of form and the formation of designs of meaningful shapes (Yavuzer, 1995, 27).

The development of drawing in children requires a certain process, just like language acquisition. During the babbling period, which is the first stage of language acquisition, children make meaningless sounds. Over time, sound repetitions become meaningful in certain situations, and acquisition occurs. Before they start the scribbling stage in drawing, children like to leave marks on some objects with their wet fingers. Walking on the sand by the sea, footprints make them happy. He can draw a line with a piece of wood in the sand and interpret it as making a road. Then they draw lines and dots on the paper haphazardly and aimlessly. Since their hand and finger muscles are not yet sufficiently developed, they cannot even hold the pen properly. However, as their ability to hold objects develops with small muscle development, they also show increasing success in holding a pen. This development is also reflected in his drawings, with the lines becoming more and more regular. The photo below illustrates this situation.



Picture 1. The child in the photo is just starting to draw at the age of 3 and holds the pen from above.

The child, who could not even make sense of his own drawings at first and was angry and angry about it, now begins to compare his lines to objects and makes his own interpretations. With Luquet's words, he describes his drawings and tries to draw what he describes. It is at this time that the child begins to form his first words and sentences.

By experimenting, the child's hand-eye interaction also increases, and he draws steep lines, oblique lines, zigzags, and circles by directing his pencil as he wishes. All these drawings go from complex to organized. Pictures that are drawn as if they are flying, nested, and on paper without any concern for placement, begin to be drawn separately. After points, lines and circles, angular drawings also manifest themselves.

Kellog, who examined the drawings of 8000 children, stated in his book "Analyzing Children's Art" that they generally consisted of 20 basic forms of scribbles. Yavuzer in 1995 summarized these scribble shapes in a table as follows:

Scribble 1		Point
Scribble 2		Single vertical line
Scribble 3		Single horizontal line
Scribble 4		Single diagonal line
Scribble 5		Single curved line
Scribble 6		Multiple vertical lines
Scribble 7		Multiple horizontal lines
Scribble 8		Multiple diagonal lines
Scribble 9		Multiple curved lines
Scribble 10		Half bent open line
Scribble 11		Half bent closed line
Scribble 12		Zigzag or wavy line
Scribble 13		Single circle line
Scribble 14		Multiple circle lines
Scribble 15		Spiral line
Scribble 16		Overlapping spiral lines
Scribble 17		Overlapping open spiral line
Scribble 18		Opened circular lines
Scribble 19		Single intersecting circle
Scribble 20		Imperfect circle

Kellogg's table of scribble varieties quoted by Yavuzer in 1995

As seen in the table, the child's drawing adventure begins with dots and continues with vertical, horizontal, curved lines, zigzags, and multiple lines. Then it continues in the form of spiral lines and imperfect circles. Another similar table in Kellogg's book is shown below.



In this picture, it is shown that the circular shapes that follow the first scribbles gradually transform into human figures and the drawing of the stick figure.

1. Drawing as Tool of Communication

Considering that the first drawings began between 18-24 months, it can be said that children preferred to draw as an easy means of communicating with their environment while still having a limited vocabulary at that time. Drawing relaxes the child, allows him to express himself and develops a sense of confidence. On the one hand, the child transfers his inner world to paper with his drawings; on the other hand, he enables those around him to have information about him and get to know him. Where words are not enough to describe, drawings mediate our understanding of the child's emotional world. Understanding the communication that children establish through drawings gives us a deeper understanding of children's mental and psychological state and their personalities.

Sometimes, at first glance at the child's picture, it is understandable that he has feelings while making the picture. If the drawing has a depressing or disturbing image, a negative impression of the child's thoughts can be obtained. For example, if there are intense scribbles, this may indicate that the child is angry about something.

If the child is making a car sound with his mouth while scribbling, what he is trying to draw may be a car, or he may be trying to draw a car driving on the road. So, the line that seems meaningless to the adult may have a lot of meaning for the child. A smiling and radiant sun on the paper is a sign of a harmonious, happy, contented child. The picture below is a good example of this.



Picture 2. In this picture of a child of 3 years old, the smiling sun in the upper left corner and the scribbles at the bottom represent sunlight.

The child's stick figures (stickman) usually represent his family or people with whom he feels closest. He draws his favorites close to himself. The largest drawn one represents the most important person for him. In the picture below, the child is trying to describe her closeness to her mother.



Picture 3. Picture of a 3.5 years old child. The little one is herself, and the big one is her mother.

The more details a child adds to the drawing, the better his cognitive ability is developing. Children will usually add details like spectacles on the ‘father’, or a skirt on the mother. Children with acute observation may even be able to notice and interpret physical appearance differences and may even be able to see ‘gender’ differently. In the picture below, the child, 4 years old, noticed that his grandfather wears glasses, so he reflected this in his drawing.



Picture 4. Drawn by a 4 year old child. Spectacle detail is sign of cognitive development.

2. Aesthetic Evaluation

There is no specific age period in which aesthetic development begins. When objects and shapes are seen in harmonious relationships with each other and when thinking, feeling, and meaning are realized, a development is made in terms of aesthetic sensitivity. If feelings and thoughts are expressed in an order, an aesthetic value emerges. (Yavuzer,38)

In order to examine the aesthetic aspect of drawing development, the theoretical framework of which we discussed above, a corpus consisting of the paintings of 5 children, aged 2-5, was created. The pictures in this corpus were evaluated in terms of aesthetics, that is, line shape, color, space perception, positioning, and proportion features, according to the order of drawing development.

Below are a few examples that we have selected from the corpus, showing the first stage of drawing development.



Picture 5. Drawn by a 27-month-old child.

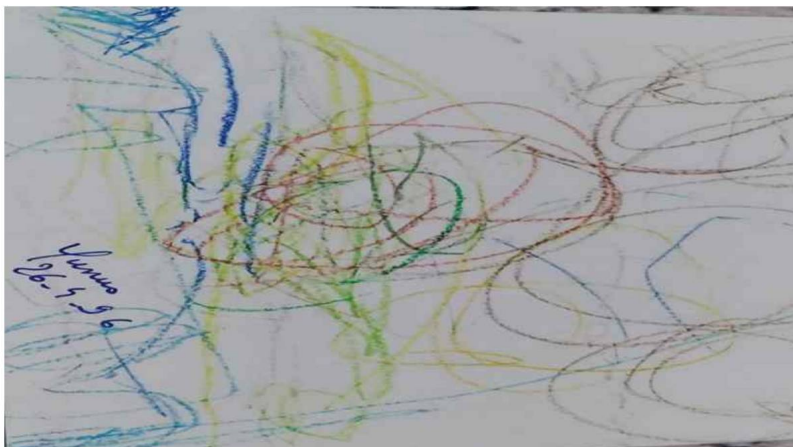
In this drawing, consisting of dots and dashed lines, an aimless and random drawing style can be seen. The child is not yet proficient in holding a pencil. Drawing creates motor and visual pleasure for him. The scribbles that children make unconsciously at first become controlled in

parallel with their development. There is a complex image in the middle of the paper.



Picture 6. 2 years, 4 months.

This picture shows the child's transition from dots and dashed lines to continuous circular lines in the pure scribbling phase. It is also a sign of cognitive progress. An aesthetic effect cannot yet be mentioned regarding the use of color and positioning.



Picture 7. 2 years, 6 months.

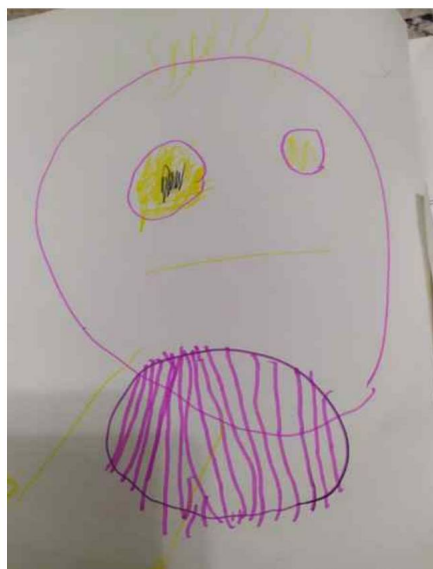
This picture is also an example of spiral line experiments; it has a more colorful appearance than the previous ones. The colors are completely optional and emotional (Ülger, 2023: 1011). These drawings, which adults call scribbles, can represent an object or a person for the child.



Picture 8. 2 years, 6 months.

Again, it is the scribbling phase, but this time there are dense scribbles at the bottom of the paper, indicating the development of spatial perception. It can be considered as an attempt to create an order on paper.

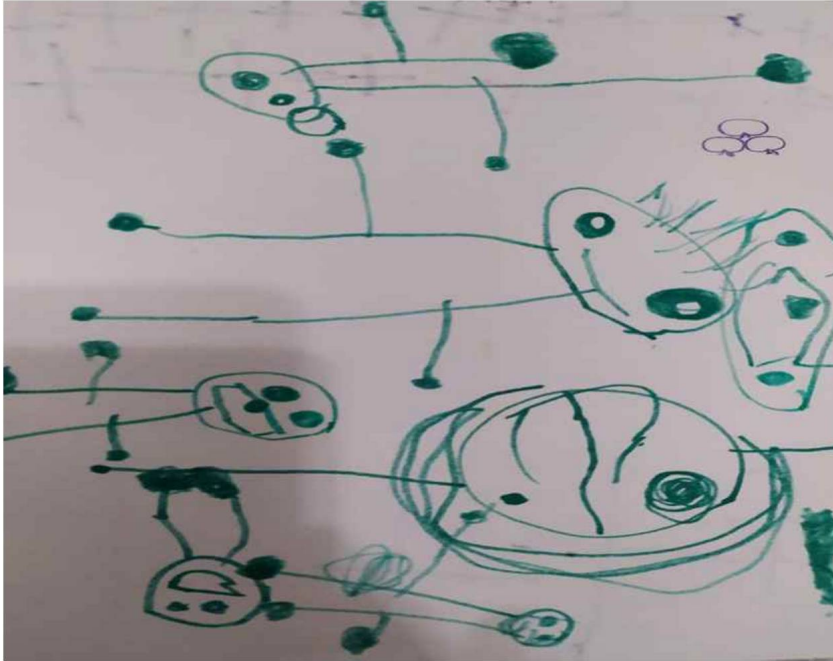
Apart from the scribbles, the first shapes seen are continuous semicircles, circles or rounds. Because this is how a child begins to make a human figure. This is an indication of his mental development and his mental awareness of those around him. Even though the circles are not very smooth, he expresses what he draws with his own interpretation. Thus, the child shows that he is now in the Interpretive Scribble or Meaningful Scribble phase. The examples reflecting this period are below.



Picture 9. First human figures.

As can be seen, at this stage, the doodles cease to be aimless and uncontrolled, and begin to turn into conscious lines. Around the age of three, the child begins to draw the first human figure as a single round, that is, a head. Because the first part that the child perceives is the head. At first, the eyes are drawn first, then the mouth. When the child is three

and a half years old, he adds a second round as the body. Parts such as arms, legs, fingers and feet are added to this body in the form of lines.



Picture 10. This picture was drawn by 3 years old child.

In this picture, the downward lines added only to the head represent the legs, and the sideways lines represent the arms. As the child progresses in drawing and mental development, the details in the pictures begin to increase. Parts such as hair, teeth, and the neck are among the features of the 4-year-old picture. Thus, the child enters the stage of reality in the picture. However, he may draw the eyes outside rather than inside the head, or he may draw the arm lines out of connection with the body. In this case, it is called "Failed Realism" in Luquet (Yavuzer, 1995, 39). Aesthetic elements such as the use of color, perception of space, and proportion begin to show themselves in the paintings. The drawings of a 4-year-old child and a 4.5-year-old child below are good examples of this transition.



Picture 11. Drawn by a 4-year-old boy.



Picture 12. Drawn by the same child, a 4-year-old.



Picture 13. 4 years old.



Picture 14. Drawn by a 4 years 6 months old girl. She and her mother.

These last pictures show the child's drawing development process and his artistic and aesthetic development in this process. At first, simple scribbles later turned into meaningful shapes. Ordinary circles represent the human figure; simple lines represent parts of a body. If the child's drawing ability develops, it is possible for him to develop above his age and make more beautiful drawings. In Example 14, as in a girl's drawing. While she drew her mother and herself in this painting, she also reflected an aesthetic element in her painting by transferring the color harmonies to her painting in a realistic way. She dyed his mother's hair blonde, just like in reality. Another example of aesthetic development can be seen in the painting of a 4-year-old boy (picture 13). Here, he reflected his spatial perception by placing the child's drawing proportionally on paper.

CONCLUSION

Drawing has a very special place for children. Even if they are made in a childish manner, primarily for the sole purpose of gaining pleasure and developing certain movements, they are more effective as a means of communication. Apart from this, it can also be considered as a sign of the child's cognitive development and the external expression of his inner world.

Children's drawings can be defined as the embodiment of the images in the child's mind. In this respect, by transferring his own feelings and thoughts to paper, he gives information about himself to those around him and ensures their understanding. The lines that adults see as insignificant scribbles say a lot about the child. Color confusion, dense lines, and larger or smaller shapes reflect what the child is experiencing in his inner world and provide clues about his feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. For this reason, children's drawings carry very important meanings behind what they appear to be.

With this examination of children's paintings in the process of covering the first two stages of painting development, which generally

starts around the age of 2 and continues until the age of 12-13, and the range of 2-4-5 years, we have observed how the child develops mentally along with his drawings, and how he passes from pure scribble to the meaningful and interpretive scribble stage, and then to the reality stages.

Although the developmental stages are divided into certain age ranges, they may differ due to the individual, physical and cognitive characteristics of children. Although there is no conformity to aesthetic rules in children's paintings as in adults, it cannot be said that they are completely devoid of aesthetics. If the child is supported in painting and provided with sufficient opportunities, his development will be better and his creativity will increase.

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[Abstract]

Children's Drawings, as A Domain of Exercise of the Semiotic Function and Its Aesthetic Appreciation

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Children's drawings are one of the most important productive actions that enable the child to establish relationships with his environment and the outside world. Each picture drawn contains a piece of the child himself. Because he tries to express his inner world, his way of thinking, his relationship with his environment, and any problems he has, through his paintings. Therefore, due to their iconic qualities, they have a semiotic function and enable the child to be recognized and understood by those around him.

As a means of communication or a sign that mediates communication, children's drawings also have aesthetic properties. Aesthetic appreciation in children's drawings transcends traditional norms. It's not about technical proficiency but about the purity of expression. A child's artwork often exudes a raw authenticity, unburdened by societal conventions, which resonates deeply with viewers.

In this study, we would like to consider the importance of drawing, which is one of the semiotic function areas of communication in children, the aesthetic aspects of drawings, and how children communicate through drawing.

Keywords: Children's drawings, semiotic function, aesthetic appreciation, semiotics and aesthetics.

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