

Elements in Assessing Children's Art Works

By

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Abstract

The focus of the study was to examine the content of children's drawing based on some elements that could be used to assess children's art works (skill, enthusiasm, eclecticism, imagination, expression, improvisation and detail). The instrument used for collecting the data was a questionnaire, and a total number of respondents were fifteen (15) experts in the field of art. The study reveals that the responses of the experts showed that the rating scale was accepted as valid for this study. The reliability Coefficient established using the Spearman-Brown Split-Half method was found to be the same with the one established by Guttman Split-Half method. It is recommended that Items on the assessment scale (skill, enthusiasm, eclecticism, imagination, expression, and detail), should be adapted as a standard method of assessing children's drawings. The assessment scale will help the teacher's to give specific attention to the development of the children, and thereby monitoring their appropriate development with more precision.

Introduction

Assessment according to Slattery (2011) is the process of observing and measuring learning. He believes that when children's art works are assessed, it provides a better understanding of what students are learning and it engages them more deeply into the process of learning. Assessing children's development in art should take into account a series of learning activities, and this requires a range of assessment tools, which include teacher observation and works done by the children. Together they provide the teacher with a comprehensive overview of the children's development in art and also the effectiveness of teaching.

Through observation teachers can take note of the children's visual expression that may be seen in their willingness to explore. The teacher should also note how involved they are in expressing their ideas in visual form. Other things to look for would be the ability to handle materials and tools and to use them with confidence as their skills are developed.

There is the need to be aware of the best ways to assist children learn and develop during their early years. When children engage in art activities, they among others, learn to develop the ability to transform feelings and ideas at their various stages of their development into visual form.

It is necessary to assess children's works so as to help children know about art, as well as developing some skill in the production of images and forms. Teachers will be able to determine what part of the curriculum needs changing or modification as a consequence of their assessment and also see what has been successful. It also helps teachers to see what stage of development and the capability the children have reached, and to plan ahead.

Children's art works demand originality, spontaneity, sequential thinking, problem solving, and manual skill. The main focus of the study is to examine the content of children's drawings based on skill, enthusiasm, eclecticism, imagination, expression, improvisation and detail. The assessment of these qualities requires not just giving marks to the works but also observing the children perform, and to observe the growth which a child experiences during the process of producing the work. In the study of children's developmental stages, there are certain important elements to consider in making decisions about a child's development and educational needs; this may help children to enhance opportunities for optimal growth, development and learning. This could cover areas like skill development, enthusiasm, eclecticism, imagination, expression, improvisation and details. Assessing children's drawings based on these elements will enable the children to understand the progress they are making in art.

Children's art can be appreciated based on their performances; their ability to respond to what is in their environment.

Appreciating children's art

Art appreciation does not only help children learn to think, it also plays a central role in the education and development of a growing child. At an early stage of a child's development, their senses and perception are very sensitive to the environment. Stewart (2013) observed that the importance of exposing children to art early in life is often undervalued; but giving young children an appreciation for art encourages exploration, self expression, imagination and creativity. She further states that art teaches children to think openly, create new meaning and to be more tolerant of others. She suggested some ways to encourage art appreciation in children:

- . Provide creative materials
- . Visit art museums
- . Read wordless picture books
- . Activities that encourage early art

Art has moved beyond finger and paints but into the world of Da Vinci and Van Gogh. Teachers are using classic art to improve some of the young children to observe closely, think critically and discuss respectfully (Frey, 2015). The approach helps children describe what they see in details and provide evidence for their observation.

Elements in Assessing Children's Art Works

There seems to be no universal standard for assessing children's drawings but there are several assessment scales that have been used for some specific purposes based on certain criteria for some particular cases (Umar, 2003). Various researchers have given their opinion on assessing children's drawing on criteria such as originality, flexibility, fluency, and so on. However, these assessments of children's art works based on such items alone may not be adequate, but observation of the process of producing the works should also be considered. In addition to these,

skills, enthusiasm, eclecticism, imagination expression, and details could be measured and used in assessing children's art works.

Skills in children's drawings

Skills refer to the ability for a child to handle appropriate arts and craft materials to produce various visual art works. A skill is the learned capacity to carry out predetermined results often with the minimum outlay of time, energy or both. Skills usually require certain environmental stimuli and situations to assess the level of skill being shown and used. Logsdon (2010) believed that there is a Fine Motor Skill which involve the small muscles of the body that enable such functions as writing, grasping small objects, small motor skills which also involve fine motor control and dexterity.

Enthusiasm in children's drawings

Enthusiasm is a strong feeling of excitement and interest in children in the process of visual art expression that is manifested in their finished art works. Enthusiasm according to the Oxford Advanced Learners dictionary is a strong feeling of excitement and interest in something and a desire to become involved in it. People enjoy drawing; this is because drawings stimulate the desire to express oneself. Children should be allowed the greater freedom to explore papers, walls, boards or any other surfaces that can be used to draw on, as far as their imagination will permit, they are always deeply engrossed in what they are drawing, the sounds and motions they unwittingly make as they draw, the drawings draw them into a world of possibilities; to form a face, a hand, or to fancy an emerging significance until the world is "drawn" as they experience it.

Eclecticism in children's drawings

Eclecticism is the freedom for children to express themselves in various approaches to visual art expression in their art works. Eclecticism can be seen in children's art work by the way they express themselves in their own way and approaches to art which may be very different from that of adult's way of seeing art

Imagination in children's drawings

Imagination is the manifest ability for children to create mental and visual images into unique forms. Sasson (2010) defined imagination "as the ability to form a mental image of something that is not perceived through the sense. It is the ability of the mind to build mental scenes, objects or events that do not exist, are not present or have happened in the past". Everyone possesses some imagination ability. In some it may be highly developed and in others it may manifest in a weaker form. Imagination makes it possible to experience a whole world inside the mind of children.

Expression in children's drawings

Expression is when children express their experiences through their visual art works. Over the years, educators, psychologists, and philosophers have come to appreciate the value of children's art and its important role in early childhood education. It is now agreed by many in the field that exploring and creating with art materials help children become more sensitive to the physical environment; promotes cognitive development; and increase their social and emotional development. Young children who are encouraged to engage in expressive art activities also gain a sense of accomplishment and grow towards achieving independence and autonomy.

Details in children's drawings

Details are the ability for children to display the characteristic according to their developmental stages in their visual art works. Cox (1993) observed that the human figure is one of the earliest topics drawn by the young child and remains popular throughout childhood and into adolescence. At first the child may not intend their scribbles to represent anything, but this may change with age, as the child ages, these marks become more representative and often more realistic (Mshelbila, 2006). Children add details and complexity to their drawings, like faces attach to bodies.

Procedure

Research Instruments

The instruments used for collecting data for this study was a questionnaire for experts in the field of Art to seek their opinion on the seven point scale (skill, enthusiasm, eclecticism, imagination, expression, improvisation and detail).

Population and Sample

The population for the study were all the lecturers in the Fine Art Department Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and University of Maiduguri. A total of 15 purposefully selected experts responded to a questionnaire on validation of the instrument for assessing the children's drawings. The experts were selected because they are specialists in Creative arts and Arts education. There are seven items on the rating scale. These include skill, enthusiasm, eclecticism, imagination, expression, improvisation and details.

Table 1: Qualifications of the Responds

S/N	Respondents	Qualification
1	5	Professors
2	6	PhD Holders
3	4	Masters Holders
4	15	

Reliability of the Instrument

In order to ascertain the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach's Alpha values of .915 for part one (1) (a - skill, enthusiasm, eclecticism, imagination) and .786 for part two (2) (b - expression, improvisation, detail) were established. The Correlation Coefficient between Forms was .848. The Spearman-Brown Coefficient for equal length was .918 and unequal length was .919 and Guttman Split-Half Coefficient was .883.

Table 2: Reliability of the seven items on the rating scale

Cronbach's Alpha	part 1	value	.915
		N of items	4a
	Part 2	value	.786
		N of items	3b
		Total N of items	7
Correlation Between Forms			.848
Spearman-Brown Equal Length			.918
Coefficient Unequal Length			.919
Guttman Split-Half Coefficient			.883

a The items are: skill, enthusiasm, eclecticism and imagination.

b The items are: expression, detail and improvisation

Furthermore, the Inter-Item Correlation Coefficient was also calculated for the seven assessment variables, and improvisation was found to have Inter-related Correlation Coefficient ranging from minimum of .354 for eclecticism to .503 for skill. These values appeared to be low, and the position of the experts on improvisation was undecided, therefore Improvisation was dropped from the assessment scale.

Table 3: Inter-Item Correlation Coefficients of the seven items on the rating scale

	Skill	Enthusiasm	Eclecticism	Imagination	Expression	Improvisation	Detail
Skill	1.000						
Enthusiasm	.850	1.000					
Eclecticism	.699	.666	1.000				
Imagination	.708	.801	.646	1.000			
Expression	.773	.746	.665	.804	1.000		
Improvisation	.503	.440	.354	.375	.482	1.000	
Detail	.737	.687	.757	.713	.754	.410	1.000

After improvisation was dropped, apart from Cronbach's Alpha for part one (1) which dropped by .020, all the values for the reliability statistics increased significantly.

Thus the reliability Coefficient established using the Spearman-Brown Split-Half method was found to be the same with that established by the Guttman Split-Half method at .930.

Table 4: Reliability of the six items on the rating scale

Cronbach's Alpha	part 1	value	.895
		N of items	3a
	Part 2	value	.902
		N of items	3b
		Total N of items	6
Correlation Between Forms			.870
Spearman-Brown Equal Length			.930
Coefficient Unequal Length			.930
Guttman Split-Half Coefficient			.930

a The items are: skill, enthusiasm, eclecticism

b The items are: imagination, expression, detail

All the scores for skill, enthusiasm, and eclecticism, constituted part 1, and imagination, expression and detail constituted part 2. These were compared using Spearman Brown split half, Cronbach Alpha and Guttman Split half. The reliability coefficient for Spearman Brown equal length and unequal length are .930 respectively. These agree with Guttman Split half coefficient of .930. The reliability coefficient using Cronbach Alpha was .895 for part 1 and .902 for part 2 and correlation between forms was .870, all these coefficient show high reliability for the instrument. Based on the response of the experts in the field of Art, these showed that the six items on the assessment scale were considered valid for assessing children's art works, but were undecided with regards to improvisation.

Validity of the Instrument

Table 2: Validity of the items on the rating scale

Rating Scale	SA		A		U		D		SD		TOTAL
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Skill	6	40	5	33.3	1	6.7	1	6.7	2	13.3	15
Enthusiasm	11	73.3	2	13.3	2	13.3	-	-	-	-	15
Eclecticism	9	60	1	6.7	5	33.3	-	-	-	-	15
Imagination	12	80	1	6.7	-	-	2	13.3	-	-	15
Expression	11	73.3	4	26.7	-	-	-	-	-	-	15
Details	3	20	9	60	-	-	1	6.7	2	13.3	15
Total	51	56.7	22	24.4	8	8.9	5	5.6	4	4.4	90

Key:

SA – Strongly Agree

A – Agree

U – Undecided

D – Disagree

SD – Strongly disagree

F - Frequency

The scores of 40% on strongly agree and 33.3% on agree, making a total of 73.3% indicate that skill is rated as a valid item for the assessment of the children's' drawings. Similarly enthusiasm was rated eighty six point six (86.6%), eclecticism sixty eight (68%), imagination eighty six point seven (86.7%), expression one hundred (100%) and details eighty (80%). The overall assessment of the six items on the rating scale was fifty six point seven (56.7%) and twenty four point four (24.4%) for agree making the total of eighty one point one (81.1%). This shows therefore that the rating scale has been rated by the experts as valid for use in assessing children's drawings.

Conclusion

In the study of children's developmental stages, there are certain important elements to consider in making decisions about a child's development and educational needs; this helps children to enhance opportunities for optimal growth, development and learning. This covers areas like skill development, enthusiasm, eclecticism, imagination, expression and details. Assessing children's drawings based on these elements will enable the children to understand the progress they are making in art. Children's art can also be appreciated and not undervalued by adults and parents who see art as a waste of time.

Every child has the ability and skill to produce various forms of art. Children are always excited when given the freedom to express themselves; there is always that strong feeling and excitement and interest seen in every child in the process of art making in various approaches, not only that, the children are able to display the characteristic according to their developmental stages in art. The response of the respondents has shown that the six items on the assessment scale can be used for assessing children's art works.

Suggestions:

- As children progress in their art works, their development should be based on each of the items on the assessment scale (skill, enthusiasm, eclecticism, imagination, expression and detail).
- Items on the assessment scale (skill, enthusiasm, eclecticism, imagination, expression and detail), should be adapted as a standard method of assessing children's drawings. The assessment scale will help the teacher's to give specific attention to the development of the children, and thereby monitoring their appropriate development with more precision.
- It will also help the teachers to assess the children's drawings with more precise records of their specific progress at each artistic developmental stage.

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