

ARTISTIC PRACTICES, LEARNING, AND DEVELOPMENT

# Artistic Practices, Learning, and Development

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## First Literature Review

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### **Abstract**

In this literature review, I will be highlighting perspectives of children's art in relation to differences in learning; artistic behaviors; and, creative development of children of various ages through painting and drawing. Authors Eisner, Wolf, Bruner, Louis, and Leeds, recounted in this analysis contribute to the theories of painting as being more replete than other art mediums, verify that children progress at different rates, and demonstrate a correlation between language and art-making. Much consideration of stage theory philosophies being revised to broader, less ridged phases of artistic development is conferred. The connection between artistic development and language is explored more specifically through the work of Kindler and Darras. The conclusion of this literature review values the uniqueness of each individual child through their artistic growth.

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### First Literature Review

#### **Summary**

According to Bruner (2004), “Learning remains an elusive topic, despite the endless research lavished on it” (p. 13). The same holds true for artistic behavior and development. There are many methods of research and opinions on each of these topics. The Yerkes-Dodson law indicates a reduction in learning occurs with too much or too little incentive. Skinner believed learning occurred through positive reinforcement. Learning theories have also been based on association, which is likewise true in artistic development. J.B. Watson, behavioral psychologist, placed an American twist on Pavlov’s research “by stressing how all learning occurred through stimulus and response” (Bruner, p. 17, 2004). Art students, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, learned through stimulus and response by copying the old masters, drawing from plaster casts, and drawing live models (Leeds, 1989). Yet distinguishing the purposes of humans and machines becomes increasingly important and intertwined in today’s modern culture. Arike (2001) questions art of the future as being in “direct competition with post-human engineering: the creation of life now” (p. 451). Will learning and problem-solving slow or decrease due to the impact of digital technology? The authors recognize a child’s intention and understanding is as varied as their individual development. Louis suggests “artistic progress is better understood as a journey” (p. 347, 2005). Children show repleteness through painting over drawing because, according to Louis, drawing materials do not offer as many opportunities as paint. Children are more likely to discover desired representational outcomes from painting

which, in turn, allows for more choices and decisions. Eisner also discusses things children learn when they paint; starting with “they learn they can” (p. 6, 1978) and concluding with “the world itself can be regarded as a source of aesthetic experience and as a pool of expressive form” (p. 9, 1978). Ivashkevich recognizes children’s desire to draw realistically and “always bears the distinct mark of the particular child’s intentions and ideas in negotiation with others...an artifact of lived experience” (p. 57, 2006). Wolf believes along the same lines as Ivashkevich in that critical thinking skills can be developed through art education. Artistic development occurs at different times in a child’s life. Although children develop at similar rates, their individual personality and surroundings influence their creative progression.

Children grow through phases, as Louis suggests, but this growth occurs at different times and through a variety of factors. All children are influenced by cultural ideas and graphic models including “books, media images, and drawings produced by peers” (Ivashkevich, p. 46, 2006). Ivashkevich quotes other authors, Brent and Marjorie Wilson, stating a child’s spontaneous drawing falling into four major categories: “common, archeological, normative, and prophetic” (p. 48, 2006) and exposes a variety of drawing behaviors by children. Louis recognizes “children’s changing understanding of the demands of the task at hand, with their cognitive functioning taking an intentional turn” (p. 342, 2005). The model of *iconicity* gives an understanding of differences in development (Kindler and Darras, 1997), but is incomplete in addressing artistic expression (Louis, 2005). Louis also asks *when* is art, opposed to *what* is art. Children obviously develop through phases of artistic expression with experience and exposure being a determining factor. “Young children undoubtedly draw upon cultural conventions, social situations, and denotative systems to give shape and form to their experience” (Louis, p. 353,

2005). Studying long-term artistic development as Wolf recommends, aids not only the researcher, but the child's recognition of creative progress as well.

The concept most important to me is the connection between artistic development and language over a long period of time. Understanding the artistic growth of children has been influenced by many professionals such as Piaget, Luquet, and Lowenfeld. However, revisions of their rigid *stage* theories of artistic development help better define more realistic progress of the child. These stages involve children creating a variety of visual language which communicates thoughts, ideas, emotions, values, understandings, or realities (Kindler & Darras, 1997). Icons and symbols are developed in very young children but are often incomplete without words, sounds, and gestures. "The turn to language, moreover, has shifted learning-related research away from many of the older, artificial experimental paradigms" (Bruner, p. 20, 2004). The artistic development of children increases through experience, conversations, and increased coordination. Children build on visual and verbal languages with each stage of artistic progress. All art possesses communication through ideas, emotions, and understandings of the artist, which in turn provokes a variety of language. "Many drawings are incomplete and reveal little about intentions or abilities of those who produced them if they are detached from a context which includes words, sounds, and gestures" (Kindler & Darras, 1997). Even in the early years of childhood, where uncontrolled scribbling takes place, babbling indicates a delight in discovery. Kindler and Darras (1994) classify these stages as *phases* they call *iconicity*. Each iconicity, 1 through 5, indicates a qualitative change in artistic development. Around the age of two or three years (Iconicity 3), besides mimicking others, children vocalize a rhythmic tempo in connection with their marks and movements during art-making. During Iconicity 4, children become aware of images having the ability to communicate. When shared with others, artwork during

this phase provides opportunities for praise which encourages visual, verbal, and gestural cues (Kindler & Darras, 1997). Iconicity 5 is a phase that displays extensive exploration with complexity and improved control over materials as the child's art is successful in creating meaning without spoken language. However, phase 5 presents peer conversations and collaborative problem solving with their artwork. Regardless of the age of the child, language develops through exploration in art-making. Without opportunities in art, would children have less or slower development in linguistics and semantics?

### **Definitions/Key Concepts**

*Iconicity* is a term indicating areas of qualitative change in artistic development as proposed by Kindler and Darras (1994). These five levels range from uncontrolled scribbling to increased detail and complexity. "Each iconicity level delineates a range of behaviors and possibilities, rather than describing a precisely defined norm" (Kindler & Darras, p. 23, 1997). These revisions of *stage* theories of artistic development help better define progress of the child. Stages involve children creating a variety of visual language which communicates thoughts, ideas, emotions, values, understandings, or realities (Kindler & Darras, 1997). Louis advises artistic growth as *phases* rather than stages in order to avoid a rigid concept and to offer more variation for individual development. Studying a rich, detailed record of a child's artwork over a period of time, according to Wolf (1988), also allows better understanding of the thought processes.

*Replete* is a term Louis (2005) uses to describe artistic development with paint: "Drawing media do not provide as many opportunities for repleteness as paint, at least in the hands of artistic beginners...even beginners can make replete images by spreading, mixing colors,

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and thinning paint” (p. 348, 2005). Dictionary.com defines replete as “abundantly supplied or provided; filled” (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/replete>).

### **Application and Reflection**

The authors both affirm and challenge my understandings about artistic development. Trying to formulate a one-size-fits-all explanation of artistic development is virtually impossible. Every child is unique, as is their artistic development. My own three children have displayed similar artistic growth. Yet each has progressed at different intervals with diverse interests influencing their artwork as Ivashkevich and Louis confirm in their articles. As students reach middle school, I think a revival of art education has to convince students of their natural ability or it is lost. Many of my middle school students enter my class already believing they *are* or *are not* artists. It doesn't take much to convince them they really are naturally artists through drawing, painting, and creating through a variety of materials. Through my teaching experience, I have observed children drawing what they see and understand at a very young age. However, in elementary school, students tend to result in drawing symbols in order to achieve better recognition of their work by their audience. The authors note icons and symbols being developed very early, where I see this simplified style starting later and continuing through upper elementary. The importance of sharing their work and it being identifiable overshadows their notion to let go and experiment. Students, who doubt their natural talent, always surprise themselves within a few simple drawing activities focusing on hand-eye coordination.

Leeds (1989) reports Ruskin as recognizing the importance of free, self-motivated work being more beneficial than teaching advanced concepts too early. I believe advanced concepts along with free-play are crucial to artistic development because of the range of skill and artistic development among my students. Free-play allows important discovery through experimentation. Teaching advanced concepts pushes kids to try something new or different. Offering both play and instruction allows my students to develop more confidence in their individual work. As an art educator, I believe my job is to build confidence in my students through the same opportunities real life will bring—challenging concepts along with free-play and exploration.

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