

Review of the book *Children's Drawings: The Genesis and Nature of Graphic Representation. A Developmental Study* by Antonio Machón.

J. Linaza (Universidad Autónoma, Madrid)

Professor Antonio Machón's book on *Children's Drawings* is a stimulating example of rigour and tenacity in the investigation of such a significant aspect of children's development. As the author explains in the introduction, he has compiled, classified and analysed thousands of drawings produced by boys and girls over the course of many years. In order to carry out such an ambitious project, he had to read and systematically compare the various existing theories on the development of children's drawing. And these explorations led him to shape his own vision of this fascinating process, placing the achievements of children's graphic development in the context of other developmental milestones of childhood. There is often talk of the privileged position of those who live on the boundary of two cultures, two languages, two countries, two disciplines, etc. – privileged because it provides them with a perspective that is beyond the reach of specialists and the monolingual and orthodox. The author also approaches the subject from a privileged position. In addition to a university professor specialised in children's drawing, he is a keen connoisseur of contemporary art and, in particular, painting. Possessing as he does this long, rich and outstanding experience, he has *always* viewed children's drawing with a dimension that goes beyond those traditionally expounded in works on this subject. We should congratulate him and all take pleasure in the fact that he has finally decided to share the result of so much effort, both theoretical and empirical, by publishing this work, which is set to become a *classic* on children's drawing. The English translation will make it an even more important reference work for people from a broad variety of disciplines and activities who are interested in children's drawings.

The text is structured into six chapters which are preceded by an interesting **Introduction** that explains the motivations and objectives of the book, followed by a very brief summary of each chapter.

Although the work studies the graphic development of children aged from 1 to 7, it focuses chiefly on the first **4 and a half years**, which is the most interesting and intense – and also the least studied – period in their graphic development. It witnesses the emergence of **graphic-symbolic** representation, together with important milestones in mental development and the birth of intelligence. Perhaps it is worth underlining his view of each milestone as the result of a process in which the child always plays the leading role in every adventure. Precisely for this reason the stages and their corresponding age references can be understood as vantage points from which to view the discontinuities in a path that is inevitably continuous.

In a brief description of how graphic representation arises in children, the author begins tracing the process with three chapters that deal with the pursuit of order, the discovery of form and the appearance of graphic-symbolic representation.

1. The pursuit of order

In this chapter he shows how the process of scribbling – which covers 3 years in the child's life – entails a long and intense active investigation by the child in pursuit of graphic and spatial order.

This period witnesses the appearance of an initial *enactive* type of representation in which the child associates the gestures and movements of the action of drawing with real-life actions, movements and events. These are *graphomotor* representations, which are not yet true graphic representations as it is the action – not the marks made – that evokes these external realities.

2. The discovery of form

This pursuit culminates at around 3;03 years with the discovery of the closed circular form (and the line segment), which awakens in the child the notion of form, thereby giving rise to *formal awareness*.

The end of scribbling ushers in a new period which occupies the following year in the child's life (from 3;03 to 4;03 years) and which the author has called the *period of form*.

3. The appearance of *graphic-symbolic representation*.

From the plane of graphic experience *the circle*, a symbol of unity and individuality, enlightens the darkness of personal awareness, becoming the symbolic representation of the Self.

This notion of unity and individuality of form is transferred to the rest of the beings and objects inasmuch as these also constitute specific units (objectual and affective) segregated from the temporal and spatial continuum, giving rise to a type of representation that is symbolic in nature, the first in all development.

At this point *formal units* begin to play the role of *signifiers* or *graphic referents* of the content of the child's thought, giving rise to what the author calls *graphic-symbolic representation*. This is one of the greatest and most significant events in the whole development process, the most genuine and the earliest graphic expression of *the semiotic function* that is pointed out by psychology. Other expressions of this function, such as language or symbolic play, have aroused greater interest among scholars than drawing – hence the importance of this book.

This initial mode of representation, far from being based on perceptual similarities, stems from the symbolic sense of form itself.

In the remaining three chapters the author addresses the need to study separately the formal and representational processes, the growing complexity of graphic representation and the supremacy of vision in this process of representation.

4. The two aspects of drawing

From this point onwards the author proposes studying the *formal* and *representational* processes separately, as they are activities that belong to different areas of the child's psyche.

We will now see how children decide which aspect they wish to explore in their drawing: to experiment with forms for their own sake or to use them to represent the images of their thoughts, even though this representation is only symbolic. This concentration on forms has a playful and aesthetic component that contrasts with the use of forms as a means of representing mental images.

5. Ideographic representation

The combination of units gives rise to new, increasingly complex configurations which enrich the child's graphic repertoire and help develop his aesthetic sense. The family and the school, interested

only in figurative representation, are usually dismissive of this intelligent investigative activity of children.

But the topological order of these new configurations begins to suggest to the child the first structural or configural resemblances to beings and objects – analogies based on spatial notions that are topological in nature as opposed to on outline or silhouette as adults and the school usually suggest.

The child begins to use these configurations to represent deliberately the beings and objects in his thoughts. These are the *ideograms*, images that are difficult to interpret and are formed by the addition of units – halfway between the abstraction of symbols and the figuration of the future *schemas*

6. Perceptual development and the decisive role of vision

Vision, which following the discovery of form gained prominence over the movement and action of scribbling, plays the leading role in drawing from now on (around 4;03 years). Perceptual analogies thus appear, marking the start of figurative representation in drawing – a slow process which will occupy the next three years in the child's life.

PEDAGOGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WORK

The book is undoubtedly a treatise on *children's drawing*. However, as a description and explanation of *development*, it is also an indispensable educational tool. The author believes, and rightly so, that educational methodology must necessarily be based on studying and knowledge of the processes.

This work is a reliable and thorough effort in this direction. It makes a serious and original attempt to explain these processes and can provide anyone interested in children's drawing with a new, wide-ranging and in-depth view of their graphic development.

Spanish link

<http://revistadepedagogia.org/resenas-bibliograficas/n%C2%BA-258-mayo-agosto-2014/childrens-drawings-the-genesis-and-nature-of-graphic-representation.-a-developmental-study.html>