

Drawing with Elementary Students Using Memory, Experience&Imagination

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**Overall Guiding Research Question:** How can the “motivation to represent” lead to the development of visual symbolic language?

**Research Team:** Sam Troilo, Harmony Murray & Yisha Zhao

**School Site and class:** City Neighbors Hamilton Charter School, 3rd grade & 5th grade

**Context:** City Neighbors Hamilton Charter School (CNH) is a public charter school that aims to provide an excellent public school education with high academic achievement for all students.

Their ultimate goal is that, through project-based learning, arts integration, parental involvement and community outreach, the students leave enlivened, with a deep awareness of themselves, their families and the outside community, and with the capacity to be good citizens.

They are inspired by the schools of Reggio Emilia, and especially by art. They believe in a project-based learning environment where children can learn more in the process of exploring ideas, making predictions, building models of their ideas, and testing outcomes as they apply their knowledge.

## **Research Design**

### **Methodology:**

My team chose to investigate the instructional strategies of cooperative learning and sensory associations to prompt memory recall. By using these strategies, I want to find out what children would draw after our prompts or conversations? Would they be influenced by what we discussed, or prefer to stay in their world? I tried to figure out if this task/drawing is born out of their intrinsic motives or extrinsic motives.

Our process to carry out the strategies began with setting up the topics. We chose to design two similar topics because we wanted to have a comparison with two different grades. To do this, Sam, Harmony and I created a script that contained 10-15 questions to prompt the students recall of personal experiences, focus attention on sensory impressions, and extend the frame of reference. We also made 4-5 questions in the reflection part for students to share experiences between peers. And we also want to navigate some more different ideas or trigger some extrinsic motives to keep themes diverse through these conversation processes. We also designed a hand squeeze activity (see Figure 5.) as an icebreaker activity at the beginning of our class, aimed to break the boundary between us and reflect their cognition of the social community. The hand squeeze activity is an activity Sam experienced in her theater work that needs all people to hold their hands. One person starts to squeeze a person's hand, and the person who receives the squeezing signal should squeeze another hand, in the end, the signal has to return to the first person. We divided Sam and Harmony to facilitate the first two parts, which were the icebreaker activity and questions, and I led the last reflection part.

**Drawing Activity Data: (½ page)**

**Draing Tasks:**

The task for For third grade - Thematic Drawing Approach

- Drawing a time when you played a sport or watched a sport

The task for For fifth grade - Thematic Drawing Approach

- Drawing the time that you felt like you were a part of a team

Source:

Hurwitz, A., & Carroll, K. L. (2008). *Memory & experience: thematic drawings by Qatari, Taiwanese, Malaysian, and American children*. Reston, VA: National Art Education Association.;

**Materials:** Black fine line markers and plain paper.

**Drawing Time:**

For both 3rd & 5th grade: This went according to plan, with 10 minutes for our icebreaker activity and prompts, 20 minutes for the task drawing, and 5 minutes for reflection.

**Result:**

3rd grade: All eight students completed their task drawings, and 3 of them divided the paper into different sections or used two sides of the paper to narrate stories.

5th grade: All eight students completed their task drawings, and 2 of them did two pictures.

**Findings - Narrative description of what happened**

**3rd Grade:** The 3rd graders we worked with were named Mario, Sebastian, Cas, Avery, Malakai, Spencer, and Cameron. They were all boys and had different personalities. In the beginning, the hand squeeze activity did not go well because they all wanted to squeeze one another's hands without receiving the signal, but after we tried three or four times, they became calmer and waited for the signal. In the prompt questions part, we asked, What do we need to make a sport? Where would we play this sport? Who would be there? Do people watch this sport? What is everyone wearing? What are the rules? Everyone talked about some traditional sports such as football, soccer, and baseball. By contrast, the outcomes were different from our

expectations. Only Sebastian drew a football scene (see Figure 1.). I felt they preferred to follow their intrinsic motives instead of extrinsic motives, which means they were able to answer the questions we asked, but they might not have been familiar with these things or were not interested in them. When they held the marker and paper, most of them drew games they played or cartoons they watched recently. For example, Mario was the most excited one before drawing because he said he really likes to draw, and he felt upset because we did not have colors. The “sport” he drew was an incredibly amazing scene of people fighting with a dinosaur (see Figure 2.). Since we did not let them change their drawing, even though some of them were far away from the sport, most of them could concentrate on their work, and were willing to share. In the reflection time (see Figure 3.), I felt they were isolated because a few of them did not want to share, or some of them were not concerned with others’ sharing. The outcomes, compared with 5th graders and 3rd graders, were more fantastical, and the students were better at storytelling on the paper, but their visual space organizations were messier.

**5th Grade:** Students in the 5th grade we worked with had a strong relationship with each other. According to their art teacher, they grew up together. They were Taylor, Zahara, Khamali, Johnson, Carson, Arisaema, and Peypon. The icebreaker activity went very well with them. The prompt questions were: What does the word “team” make you think of? What are some types of teams? Can a class be a team? Can a family be a team? What do you need to be a team? They answered questions actively, and everyone got a chance to talk about the team. However, I found they had the same issue with 3rd graders, which was they preferred to stay in the world they were familiar with. The goal for this task (drawing a team) was to motivate students to think more about their social relationships and community. For fostering this, we talked about many

kinds of teams, such as class teams and family teams, but they all drew sports, which seems more accessible for them to think about. I also felt that 5th graders had a hard time in the beginning. In other words, they were afraid of drawing incorrectly, so they did not want to start. Khamali asked for pencils and did not want to use a marker. Arisaema and Peypon used a paper to practice before drawing on their paper (see Figure 4.). Arisaema wanted to draw her baseball team, so she wrote down all her team members' names and practiced drawing a person on the scratch paper. She would cross out a name after she finished that person. Compared with 3rd graders, the organization of objects of 5th graders were neater and well-organized; both grades had the same motivation for this drawing task; 5th graders thought more before drawing.



Figure 3. Third Grade Reflection Time



Figure 6. Fifth Grade Reflection Time

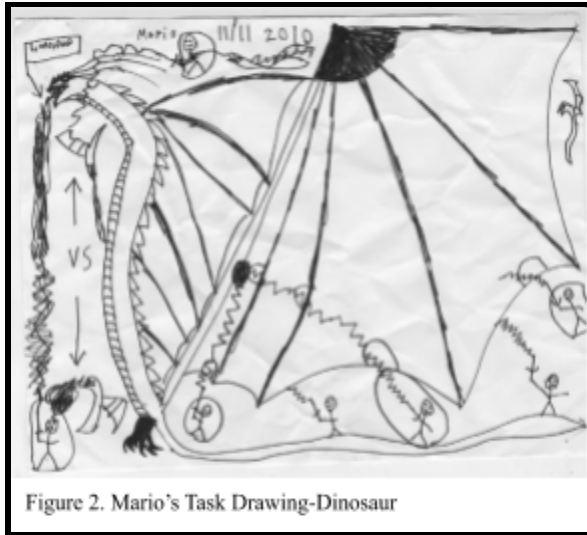


Figure 2. Mario's Task Drawing-Dinosaur

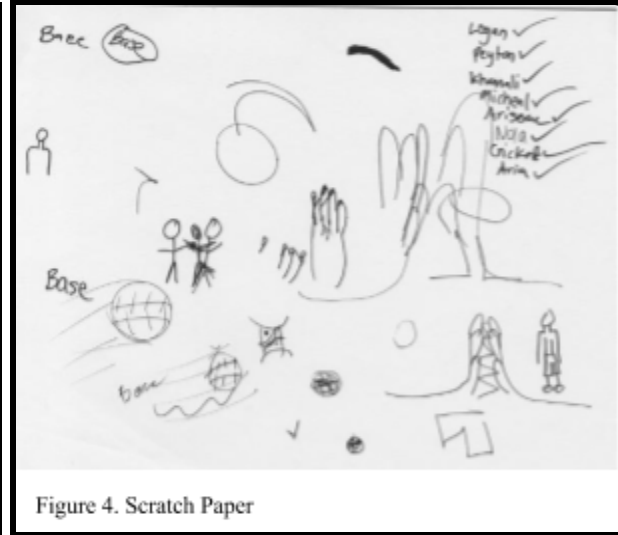


Figure 4. Scratch Paper

### Conclusions - Comparison to the readings

We tried out the strategy related to thematic approaches using pre-determined themes, from the PowerPoint “Memory & Experience” shown and discussed in the class. I felt this method is useful, and students could be prompted from their own experiences through the dialogue in drawing tasks. I was not satisfied with these tasks after class because the outcomes fell flat. I thought these tasks failed, but after reading the articles, I got some ideas and found out some answers about why students could have these unexpected actions. I will propose my concerns below and the solutions I found out.

Firstly, the 3rd graders surprised and disappointed me. As I described before, our topic was about sports, but the outcomes were all about games and cartoons. I was surprised that their drawings were fantastical and rich. The pictures were full of details that might occur in a dream, in daily life, or on TV, meaningful symbols that I would miss the most interesting part of if I did not pay attention to hearing their explanations, as well as the fanciful organization where every part floated on the paper so that we could not know its orders. I was disappointed because they did not draw the sports which they had talked about before starting. According to Judith Burton

(1980), six- to nine-year-old children are egocentric, but not in a negative way. “It is a term which describes the fact that children view the world from their own vantage point, colored by their need for love and security” (p. 62). She also says the ideas they express are the richness of their curiosity about the behavior, intention, and values of other people in their world. Nancy R. Smith confirms these ideas, and she states that children in the seven, eight, and nine-year-old stage are affected indirectly from books, movies, and television. They are able to draw more subtly, elaborately, and with richer details. They also combine viewpoints freely; inventing means to represent anything they wish (Smith, 1994). These explain all my concerns. Now, the new generations have more opportunities to watch cartoons and play iPad/pc than to go out to do some sports. They have been influenced by technology indirectly, so they are more familiar with those games than sports. I think my students felt more secure and confident in drawing games and cartoons because they experienced a lot and knew all the details. These outcomes were their vantage point of the world.

Secondly, 5th graders were so carefully with their pictures. It is good to treat artwork seriously, but art is a natural expression (Burton, 1980; Smith 1994; Carrol, 1997), so there is no right and wrong. 5th graders were afraid of starting, and their drawings were so clean and neat, which were far beyond my expectations. I even asked Harmony that if it was too hard for them during the class because I felt they were too anxious to draw and think what to draw. Lowenfeld (1957) defines this stage as “Dawning Realism”, which is frequently marked by a dissatisfaction. Nancy Smith (1994) and Carrol (1997) also explain that children in the nine, ten, and eleven-year-old begin spontaneously to limit themselves to a specific range of qualities of shapes. They may soon lose confidence in their drawing. This evidence confirmed that my



concerns were reasonable, and these are the behaviors of human development. Kerlavage advocates this stage as a “critical one in artistic development” (Kerlavage, 1997, p.52). Teachers might face a huge challenge facing these transforming students, who will get frustrated with visual art when they feel a lack of artistic expertise (Kerlavage, 1997). I think, as a teacher, I should be more open-minded to these children and give them more time and patience to pass this severe stage.



Figure 5. Hand Squeeze Activity



Figure 7. Talking with third graders



Figure 1. Sebastian's Task Drawing-Football (Third Grade)

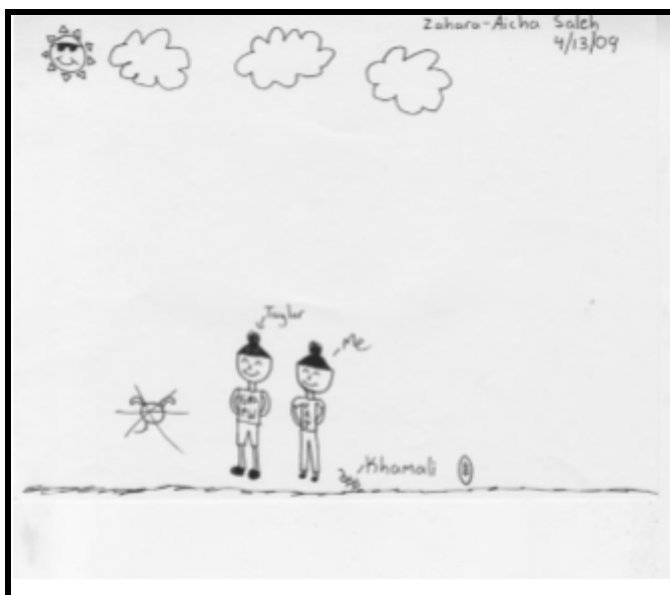


Figure 8. Zahara's task drawing-football (Fifth Grade)

**Recommendations/ Additional Ideas for Activities**

When I reflect on this mission, I think there are three points we can improve. In the beginning, we can talk more about ourselves. The introduction of ourselves is the way to let students know us as strangers, and we can say our interests and background instead of only names. This is a strategy to build a good relationship with students. Then, the speaker/teacher should move their seat to the center of the students. In the prompt question part, the speaker/teacher sat at the end of one side, so students were on the other side and can barely hear her voice. They might lose interest very quickly and could not concentrate. If the teacher can sit in the center, she could take care of students from both sides, and some of the students could engage more. The last is to make a statement before drawing, especially for students who are not confident. I think if we let students talk about their ideas or plans before drawing, they might have more clear thinking and feel more confident.

## Reference:

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