

A Study on Imagination in Drawings by Sixth Graders

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Summary

Recently, imagination, a capacity that distinguishes human beings from other creatures on the world has been highly valued in various domains, yet with rather limited studies on this subject available in our country, there is still a lot to be explored and studied. The researchers take special interest in children's imagination because, other than artists, children are generally thought to be more imaginative. This qualitative research aims to illustrate how imagination functions in the paintings of six graders in elementary school, with a view to understanding the process and the characteristics of imagination activity as well as the factors affecting imagination.

The participants, thirty-five sixth graders (eighteen boys and seventeen girls) in an urban public elementary school in Taoyuan City, were comparatively well motivated in visual arts. They were assigned to keep track of their creating experiences while doing eight pieces of imaginative works step by step. After the researchers instructed the target unit, each of the participants was given a sheet of paper for painting along with an open-ended questionnaire, in which the researchers guided the participants toward recording their thinking process. The sixth graders discussed, created and wrote. Finally they handed in

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both sheets to the researchers for analysis.

In order to comprehend how the subject of a painting influenced the process of imagination, the researchers designed different subjects for the participants to exercise their imagination. Three of the eight units focused on limited subjects. Another three units were confined to certain objects. The remaining two units were unlimited. Unit Two, “The Future of the World,” was one of them.

The methodology of this study was qualitative approach. Due to the limit of time and human resources, only thirty-five sixth graders act as the participants. Additionally, the conclusions of this study were not recommended to generalize in a way.

Some overall results, however, are achieved and explained as follows. Firstly, the implementation of imagination in the creative painting of sixth graders is divided into three phases, namely, inception of imagination, modification of imagination and termination of imagination. After a task being assigned, the participants bring imagination into play in different ways. Some scan the objects in immediate surroundings for usable materials or associate with their spontaneous sensory experiences. Others depict their personal feelings or recall past perceptions. Still others retrieve their prior non-visual knowledge or reflect their individual situations. Then they may modify their imaginative thinking according to their artistic skills, their choice of simplicity, their expectations of their works as well as opinions of others. Finally, when all the elements of imagination are done, imagination activity is terminated. Imagination is implemented either through divergent thinking, which is generating creative ideas by exploring many possible solutions, or through convergent thinking which is following a particular set of logical steps to arrive at a correct solution.

Secondly, imagination applied in the creative paintings of sixth graders is characterized by association of external similarity with relational thinking and creative recombination of existing elements. Those paintings are infused with popular cultural elements, such as cartoon, games, and TV programs.

Thirdly, there are internal and external factors affecting imagination activity. The personal factors include individual capability of painting, prior experiences in painting, aesthetic assessment, logical judgment or attachment to certain subjects preferred. Moreover, opinions of peers, the mainstream thinking and the reassurance of the teacher also influence final outcomes.

On the application of the research, it is suggested that sixth graders should be instructed with appropriate materials to build up their confidence in imaginative painting and that they need to be inspired by creative teaching to excite their imagination. It's also expected that arts teachers should put more emphasis on the imagination process than on the final outcome. After all, individuals differ in potential and expertise. Those equipped with active imagination will be poised to take up challenges on their life journey.

Keywords: imagination, sixth graders in elementary school, painting of children

