

CHILDREN'S GRAPHICAL RECORDS AS UNIVERSAL NON-VERBAL MESSAGES – SELECTED PROBLEMS

DJEČJI GRAFIČKI ZAPISI KAO UNIVERZALNE NEVERBALNE PORUKE - ODABRANI PROBLEMI

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Abstract

Non-verbal communication depends on children's experiences and knowledge. In artistic activity the richer one's experiences are that are related to art workshop, the greater is that person's the ability to transmit information about the world, both real and notional, fantastic, which is within the scope of interest of a young creator. The aim of planned research was: to determine ways of creating graphical records by children in preschool and early school age, as universal non-verbal messages. In the research proceedings it was important to define ways of presenting particular issues and types of perspective the children used in particular tasks. Additionally, the symbols were important that were used by children to underline the power of expression. Artistic works of children at preschool age are a creation of both the presence and the future and expression of psychical state. The artistic means used in art works are significant because they reveal logic of children's thinking, feeling and knowledge the children have.

1. Language and sign

Particular theories and scientific concepts define the notion of sign differently. As far as logic /1/ and philosophy is concerned, it is defined as a noticeable configuration of objects, properties, phenomena or events *functioning in the process of communication between people*

Sažetak

Neverbalna komunikacija ovisi o dječjim iskustvima i znanju. U umjetničkoj djelatnosti što su bogatija iskustva povezana s umjetničkim radom, to je veća sposobnost te osobe da prenosi informacije o svijetu, stvarne i nestvarne, fantastične, što je već u opsegu interesa mladog stvaratelja. Cilj planiranog istraživanja bio je: utvrditi načine stvaranja grafičkih zapisa djece u predškolskoj i ranoj školskoj dobi, kao univerzalnih neverbalnih poruka. U istraživačkom je radu bilo važno definirati načine predstavljanja određenih problema i tipove perspektive koje su djeca koristila u određenim zadacima. Uz to, važni su bili simboli koje su djeca koristila kako bi podcrtala snagu izražavanja. Umjetnička djela djece u predškolskoj dobi tvorevina su i sadašnjosti i budućnosti, te izraz psihičkog stanja. Umjetnička sredstva koja se koriste u umjetničkim djelima značajna su jer otkrivaju logiku dječjeg razmišljanja, osjećaja i znanja koje djeca imaju.

(within particular language), where it is used to convey some content (meaning) concerning external reality or internal emotional, aesthetical or volitional experiences. /2/. In linguistics, the sign, as an element perceived by senses and the carrier of information that triggers associations, is defined as a functional unit of language /3/, which has a semantic function and for which it is possible

to indicate an inseparable connection between its elements: signifier (a means of expressing) and signified (idea or concept). Apart from natural signs (symptoms) and conventional signs (verbal signs and signs of expression: signals and symbols) /2/, there are also symbols presented in the form of the language of fine arts that are crucial to understand the discussed issue.

Language, and consequently a word, constitute some kind of a set of signs, which create a portion of information, in other words a message /4/. Within the scope of general language we distinguish spoken (informal) language and written (literary) language, thus the division results from differences of means of expression used in speech and in writing determined by different goals and content ranges of speeches and written texts /5/. It can be assumed that in the case of children a form of written language are pictures they prepare. They contain many signs, which constitute information triggering associations. As written by L. S. Wygotski, *signs in child's behaviour are above all a means of communication and has inter-psychical function* /6/.

M. Hohensee-Ciszewska writes about the language of fine arts /7/ that this term is appropriate as a metaphor. It is a set of artistic means of expression, which allow the creator to present their vision, sensitivity, interpretation, expression, ideas and artistic content. The way of looking and experiencing is transposed by the creator – who can be also the child – to this particular type of direct, interpersonal, international language of art.

Drawing is the simplest form of communication between preschool children and their external environment. It uses artistic signs to present the world they know even though they often cannot precisely express their thought by words. They spontaneously and intuitively make graphic messages, which transmit content recorded with the use of the language of art.

2. Art messages

Non-verbal communication depends on children's experiences and knowledge. In artistic activity the richer one's experiences are

that are related to art workshop, the greater is that person's the ability to transmit information about the world, both real and notional, fantastic, which is within the scope of interest of a young creator.

Artistic activity allows children to communicate with external world because, as written by H. Krauze-Sikorska, *children's creation is communicating some knowledge about the world and oneself, it is also taking a stance on this content* /8/. Language of art comprises commonly used means of expression such as: colour spots, lines, compositions, perspective, used material and artistic techniques. Created artistic non-verbal messages are a way to inform about perceived real and fantastic world. Artistic activity is a form of conveying individual information, which result in works containing graphical signs and symbols, revealing knowledge about the world, which is characterized by childish egocentrism, anthropomorphism and animism. As stated by V. Lowenfeld, W. L. Brittain, *a picture that is drawn or painted by a child is something more than only a scribbling on a paper; in the moment of creation it expresses the whole personality of a child. Art sometimes preoccupies children so much that their products really express depths of their experiences.* /9/. The nature of lines on a paper or even the pressure made by the drawing tool reveal not only emotions experienced by the child during artistic activity, but also the child's temperament.

Not all young children are eager to use words, they also cannot write yet, but majority of them start using the easiest form of communication that is the artistic activity. As written by, among others, Witold Gloksin /10/, just in the post-infant age children manifest the need for expression, activation of imagination and manifestation of their mood, which is revealed in attempts to draw they undertake. Various means of artistic expression the children use allow them to create artistic pictures, which are a kind of a non-verbal code of communication with external world. The tendency to speak with the use of the language of art, which can be considered as international, general language, is manifested mostly by young children.

The signs they make can be compared with letters, as a kind of confessions presented with the use of artistic means of expression (that are as follows: colour, line, composition, proportions, symbols), to which particular meaning can be attributed. It is not easy to develop the ability to read these spontaneous and sincere graphical presentations, which constitute an artistic way of describing more and less important reports on children's life, but it may become for teachers or parents a repository of knowledge of the children, which can provide a lot of information. These reports created on a sheet of paper may be also a form of releasing of emotional load. The process of creation allows to summon up energy necessary for one's own development, so it performs the function of catharsis (purification).

3. Description of research procedure

The aim of planned research was: to determine ways of creating graphical records by children in preschool and early school age, as universal non-verbal messages. In the research proceedings it was important to define ways of presenting particular issues and types of perspective the children used in particular tasks. Additionally, the symbols were important that were used by children to underline the power of expression. As a research method the document analysis was used in relation to children's

drawings, which presented such topics as: "My family", "My town". The study involved children at preschool age. Within the topic "My family" the analysis covered: 81 drawings of 3-year-olds, 111 drawings of 4-year-olds, 138 drawings of 5-year-olds, 69 drawings of 6-year-olds; within the topic "My town" the analysis covered: 61 drawings of 6-year-olds. In total, I analysed 399 drawings presenting family and 61 drawings presenting a city (in total: 460 drawings) from the point of view of proportions used and centralization of figures, applied perspectives and symbols that occurred in the pictures. I assumed that adopted research procedure allowed to determine ways in which children created graphical messages, which were a form of transferring some hidden content such as: mood, emotions, knowledge, attitude towards reality.

4. Analysis of research results

The subject of quantitative analysis was artistic activity that allowed children to communicate with external world with the use of the language of art, which comprised means of expression such as: lines, colour spots, compositions (flat, spatial), used materials and techniques as well as perspectives, which were important from the point of view of the research problem, such as: intentional perspective, X-ray perspective and topographic perspective.

Table 1. Hierarchical perspective visible in proportions of parents and children (calculations does not cover solutions where a child is smaller than parents)

Hierarchical perspective:	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds
Figure of a child equal to parents	27,4%	35,2%	40,2%	52,3%
Figure of a child bigger than parents	2,1%	3,4%	6,6%	2,2%

Source: own research
scribbling

* Calculations does not take into account artistic works from the period of

The first one that is mentioned is intentional perspective, which is also called a hierarchical perspective. It consists in ignoring "natural" way of seeing /7/ due to some expressive or symbolic reasons. In children's paintings, similarly as in medieval art, significant figures are presented often as bigger than less important

ones (it is so called reversed perspective) because proportions of a human figure in the period when children only draw figures having head and body or simplified drawings can be characterized by emotional hierarchy. Children *do not present natural sizes in their mutual relations, as they are driven by emotional impact of particular part of the body* /11/. Hence, members of

the family presented by children often are unnaturally big in their artistic works. As shown by data in table 1, approximately one out of four picture of three-year-old children presents the figure of child as equal to figures of parents. With age such way of presenting (figure 1 and 4) is characteristic of greater and greater group of examined children, and in the case of six-year-olds it refers to half of the children. In few

cases in each age group the figure of a child is bigger than figures of parents. Why do children present their family in such a way? What is the essential non-verbal message of these drawings? It can be stated that children at preschool age draw what they know about the real world, therefore such important figures as parents and themselves are presented in their art works as equal and having the same status.

Table 2. Figures of parents and children placed in the centre of the drawing (the table does not take into account other members of the family)

Artistic symbols	3-6-year-olds
Mother	41,6%
Father	33,2%
Author of the drawing	37,1%

Source: own research

* Results do not sum up to 100%: multiple choice

The distribution of elements in the picture is another information about what is most important for a child. Centralization of a figure most often indicates importance of particular person in the child's life. Data from table 2, as far as parents and children are concerned (not taking into account other members of the family), indicate that most often the figure of the

mother is placed by children in the central part of a sheet of paper. However, the figure of the child or the father is very often placed also centrally, which indicates high rank of these persons for the child. In some presentations the two figures are located in the centre of the drawing (figure 1).

Table 3. Artistic symbols describing family presented by children

Artistic symbols	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds
Smile	34,4%	52%	70,7%	100,0%
Heart	0,0%	7,3%	7,8%	12%
Entwined hands	1,2%	4,1%	4,3%	5,0%
Sun	4,8%	38,0%	59,8%	37%

Source: own research

Artistic symbols that are present in children's drawings (table 3) are also important for expression of mood and attitude towards the presented issue. The most common sign of cheerful climate in the family is smile, which occurs above all in figures drawn by 6-year-olds as a result of their ability to use artistic means. To underline the strength of children's feelings towards family members, some of them place

hearts (figure 1). Entwined hands (figure 4) are next element that indicates important bonds between people. Cheerful mood of the drawing is quite often emphasized by the sun – appearing in particular in the group of five-year-olds. These non-verbal messages strengthen the power of expression surrounding children during drawing the members of their family.

Table 4. X-ray perspective in drawing figures

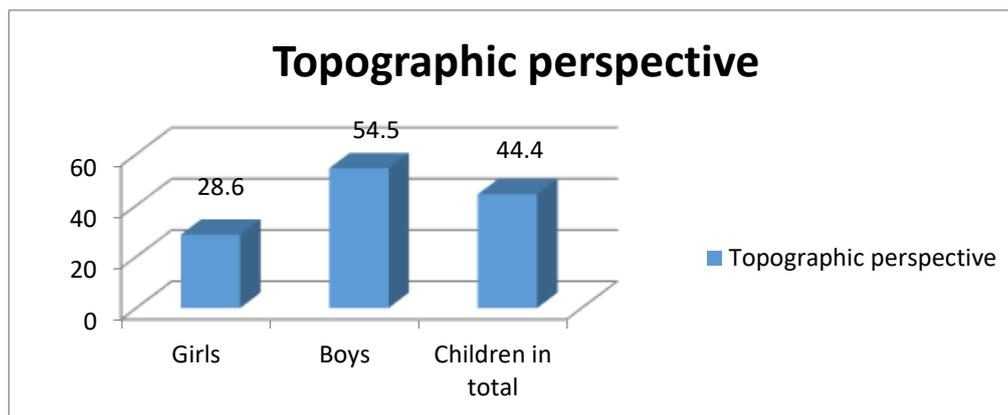
X-ray perspective	3-year-olds	4-year-olds	5-year-olds	6-year-olds
Visible navel	16,7%	17,5%	9,8%	1,6%
Visible breasts	0,0%	5,0%	0,0%	0,0%
Limbs visible in the clothes	0,0%	4,9%	7,8%	4,8%

Source: own research

Another way to present a given topic is based on the use of so called X-ray perspective (table 4), which is also called transparent. It means that children present simultaneously what is inside and outside of the drawn object or figure. In the case of drawings of family members, some children presented – which is visible in table 4 – hidden fragments of human body such as: navel, breasts (figure 2) and limbs that were under clothes (figure 3). This way of

presenting results from the fact that children share their knowledge concerning the elements of human body. Hence, in the non-verbal message they communicate: I know I have navel, I know there are legs under my clothes, because as stated S. Popek: *A child does not present things they see, but in abbreviated forms expresses own knowledge and emotional attitude towards close people and objects* /11/.

Diagram 1. X-ray perspective in drawings presenting a town



Source: own research

Next type of presenting important content by children in an artistic way is the use of topographic perspective. It often occurs in landscapes. They are presented "from the bird's eye" with simultaneous significance of objects seen from the side. Thus, as far as the topic "My town" is concerned, almost half of the children (44%) used topographic perspective as unconventional solution to present more than only one object. Such a way of presenting occurred

more often in works of boys (diagram 1). Streets and cars in analysed pictures are presented as if somebody looked down at them (from the bird's eye: figure. 5 and 6), while trees and houses (figure 5 and 6), from the front or from the side. This way of presenting, as many others illustrations, is noticeable in drawings of many children. They intuitively use such solution to be able to convey the content that is important for them in a reliable way.

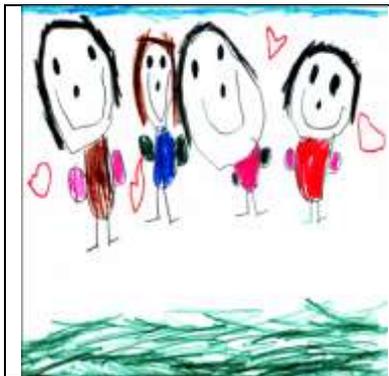


Figure. 1.
Girl, 4 years old

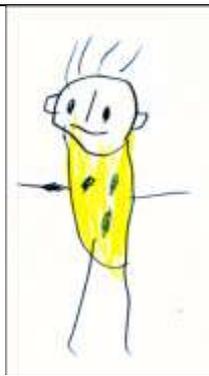


Figure. 2.
Boy, 4 years old



Figure. 3.
Girl, 5 years old



Figure. 4.
Girl, 6 years old



Figure. 5.
Boy, 6 years old



Figure. 6.
Boy, 6 years old

The need to describe everything as precisely as possible and to record the important information with the use of the language of art encourages children to use so differentiated ways of presenting reality, even within the framework of one picture. Expression that takes place while manifesting experiences and personal relations may reveal some content in artistic works and record it through language of art, which is ready to use intuitively created deformations, transformations and symbolic representations. Because artistic work *becomes for the child a means to reveal personal perceptions, thoughts, desires and aspirations related to the content of experiences. For us, the product becomes an instrument of insight into the world of experiences /12/* of the child.

Conclusions from research

Artistic works of children at preschool age are a creation of both the presence and the future and expression of psychical state. The language of art allows to document intuitively what is important for a child and is presented in particular order, size, manner of interpretation, through emotional involvement and priorities. The artistic means used in art works are significant because they reveal logic of children's thinking, feeling and knowledge the children have. This leads to several conclusions as follows:

- children at preschool age use some kind of "code" in their artistic works, which involves various deformations and transformations to increase power of expression,
- children at preschool age present the world in their artistic works, which is perceived through

the prism of possessed and, in particular recently, acquired knowledge as well as mood or attitude to presented topic,

- knowledge and need for knowing the language of art may constitute important supplementary knowledge about a child for teachers and parents.

However, it should be remembered that *not every picture must contain a deep meaning, not all symbols should be decoded, not every mystery in the drawing must be discovered, interpreted and revealed. (...) Only when a drawing attracts our attention and special interest or if the child's behaviour causes worries and anxiety (it refers also to the way of painting), we should carefully observe content and meaning of paintings and drawings.* /13/ (Fleck-Bangert, 2002:164)

Summing up, children drawing messages, as a non-verbal form to communicate explicit and hidden content, allow adults to receive signals that are not only records of knowledge, but often a reflection of current needs of young creators.

Notes

/1/ Ziemiński Z. (1976), *Logika praktyczna*, PWN, Warszawa , p.12

/2/ Petrozolin-Skowrońska B. (ed.) (1976), *Nowa encyklopedia powszechna PWN*, tom 6, PWN, Warszawa , p.1039

/3/ Podlewska D., Płóciennik I. (2006), *Słownik wiedzy o języku*, Park Edukacja, Bielsko-Biała , p.317

/4/ Okoń W. (1996), *Nowy słownik pedagogiczny*, Żak, Warszawa , p.130

/5/ Dobroszewski W. (ed.) (1980), *Słownik poprawnej polszczyzny PWN*, Warszawa , p.231

/6/ Wygotski L.S. (1978), *Narzędzie i znak w rozwoju dziecka*, PWN, Warszawa , p.88-89

/7/ Hohensee-Ciszewska M. (1988), *ABC wiedzy o plastyce*, Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, Warszawa , p.41

/8/ Krauze- Sikorka H. (1998), *Graficzny świat dziecka*, Eruditus, Poznań, p.13

/9/ Lowenfeld V., Brittain W.L. (1977), *Twórczość a rozwój umysłowy dziecka*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa, p.17

/10/ Gloksin W. (1988), *Uwarunkowania psychicznego rozwoju dziecka*, Instytut Wydawniczy Związków Zawodowych, Warszawa, p.165

/11/ Popek S. (1985), *Analiza psychologiczna twórczości plastycznej dzieci i młodzieży*, Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, Warszawa, p.55

/12/ Bobrowska Ł., Karipidis K., Popek S. (1975), *Plastyka w klasach początkowych*, Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, Warszawa , p.29

/13/ Fleck-Bangert R. (2002), *O czym mówią rysunki dzieci*, Jedność, Kielce, p.164