

# CHILDREN DRAW AND TELL

**An Introduction to the Projective Uses  
of Children's Human Figure Drawings**



**By Marvin Klepsch and Laura Logie**



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## FOREWORD

Children's drawings, after long centuries of utter neglect, first became the object of serious attention during the latter years of the nineteenth century. Until then, the children themselves were regarded as defective adults. Man was the standard by which they were to be judged. At long last, they came to be seen as persons in their own right with thoughts, feelings, and bodies peculiarly their own. Heretofore, their scribbles and tadpoles and funny manikins had found their way routinely into the refuse. Even the childhood work of the great masters was not spared total destruction.

The first publication with actual reproductions of child art appeared in 1887. The writer, Corrado Ricci, was a renowned art critic endowed with remarkable insight into the psychological implications of human figure drawings. This publication heralded the appearance of numerous scholarly publications here and abroad, notably: Sully (1895), Partridge (1902), Kerschensteiner (1905), Levinstein (1905), Kataroff (1909-10), Luquet (1913).

A major step forward occurred in 1926 with the publication by F. Goodenough of a system for evaluating intelligence from human figure drawings. This was subsequently extended and carefully standardized by Harris (1963; Harris and Roberts, 1972). HFDs are an item in many IQ tests, notably the Stanford-Binet, but the Goodenough-Harris procedure earned the title of test in its own right, where "test" is reserved for those methods that meet the demands required of standardized procedures.

Convinced that through graphic images a person expresses more than thought, clinicians have long studied drawings in a flexible way for clues that might confirm or suggest a diagnostic approach to emotional difficulties. And clinicians persist along this path even without solid support from research that utilizes the impersonal strictures of scientific investigation. The recognition accorded drawings as expressions of intellectual maturity has given rise to a wave of research aimed at establishing validity to their projective use.

Widespread use of Rorschach and other projective approaches (Szondi test, Koch's Baumtest, TAT, Buck's H-T-P), as well as a new look at human figure drawings for evidence of emotional traits, has revived interest in projectives. Machover's method of personality investigation (1949) gained wide acceptance among psychologists, as did the scoring system devised by Koppitz (1968) and, more recently Burns and Kaufman's kinetic family drawings (1970, 1972). Though theorists may remain skeptical, psychologists unremittingly persist in their efforts to measure and analyze.

The present volume surveys numerous studies and research projects that have, with varying success, sought to bring some measure of scientific certainty to assessment by introducing the methods of statistical analysis and validation into the elusive realm of personality. In addition, the authors present the fruits of their own investigations with Indian children.

The volume is well organized and follows a consistent plan. Material is presented in a clear, systematic manner. Four projective uses of the drawings are described. Numerous specimens illustrate the projection of personality, self in relation to others, groups values, and attitudes. A schema for assessment is applied to each drawing; overall impression precedes the identification of specific indicators. The authors recognize the need for integration of the drawing assessment with other methods of evaluation. The importance of the first overall or global impression conveyed by the drawings is duly acknowledged as more meaningful than a specific indicator.

Klepsch and Logie are to be complimented on their carefully researched, well written, comprehensive survey of the field, and on their personal contributions. The procedures for administering the assessments and their underlying rationale are clearly and adequately outlined.

To those beginning a study of the projective uses of child art, this work offers the necessary contextual information. Professionals already actively engaged in interpretation may refer to it for reliable, current information on the state of the art.

Joseph H. Di Leo, M.D.

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## PREFACE

*Children Draw and Tell* grew out of one author's longstanding fascination with children's drawings and the other author's encouragement of his work in an area which, she believed, was rich in exciting possibilities. Marvin Klepsch, an early childhood psychologist, uses drawings in his clinical practice and finds them a source of considerable information. This book is based partly on his doctoral dissertation dealing with children's human figure drawings (HFDs) and partly on the drawings which he has personally gathered over the years. Laura Logie, a former health educator with a keen interest in psychology, has written many articles on drama, health, and the arts for Saskatchewan newspapers. She felt that most of the HFD information to date has been directed primarily to psychologists trained in projective techniques. Both authors agreed that the time was ripe to make it available in a suitable form to child care professionals who do not have this training but who, glimpsing the potential value of the technique, are eager to learn more about it.

Klepsch has talked on this topic many times to psychologists, teachers, social workers, public health nurses, dentists, dental nurses, preschool teachers, and physicians. All are intrigued by the statements made by drawings. Many had not previously thought of drawings as a source of nonverbal communication or as expressive grapho-motor behavior. Others, although they had made some use of drawings as a measure of personality, were unaware of other projective uses.

Part I of this book deals with the background and theory of projec-

tive psychology. Chapter 1 discusses art as a projective technique and emphasizes that all our behavior, including drawings, reflects our personality, attitudes and values. Chapter 2 examines the major ways of getting information about people, and stresses that no one method should be used in isolation; rather, the use of several methods is recommended for best results. Chapter 3 is a brief overview of the major projective and non-projective uses of drawings.

Part II examines in detail the four projective uses of children's drawings. Chapter 4 looks at drawings as a measure of personality. In Chapter 5, group drawings are discussed as a measure of self in relation to others. Chapter 6 is about the use of drawings as a measure of group values, while Chapter 7 deals with drawings as a measure of attitudes. Each of these chapters contains related research, instructions for administration, directions for interpretation, and examples of children's drawings. Chapter 8 ends the book with some concluding thoughts on the projective uses of drawings.

It should be noted that the "child" (or "subject" or "drawer") is referred to as "he" throughout the text, in order to free the writing from unnecessary clutter. Unless a specific sex is being discussed, "he" should be taken to imply "he or she," "his" to imply "his or her," and "himself" to imply "himself or herself."

The chapter on attitudes, based on Klepsch's original study, makes *Children Draw and Tell* unique in that for the first time all four projective uses of HFDs are discussed and applied together. The authors hope that the book will be of value to interested readers and prompt them to begin using drawings to help them understand children better.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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M.E.K.

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*PART I*

*THE THEORY*

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## CHAPTER 1

# ART IS PICTORIAL LANGUAGE

Written and spoken languages depend on words to communicate meaning, feelings, and emotions. Other forms of language do not – like the language of mathematics, the language of love, the language of flowers, or body language. For the purposes of this book, language is given its broadest meaning. It is *Every action which proceeds from the human body*, for we communicate not only with words but with unconscious gestures, ways of sitting, standing and walking, styles of dancing and handwriting, choreography, creative writing, music, and art.

Whether the subject wills it or not, the self is projected into each of these activities and revealed to the careful observer. Unconscious gestures, for example, can betray a person's real feelings or state of mind. True, the eyes and face can sometimes deceive or mask what is really being experienced. The rest of the body, however, is usually more truthful. Ekman and Friesen (1969), gestural language scientists, attribute this to the fact that the face receives some basic training in childhood, while the rest of the body does not. To illustrate: If, as a child, you had registered extreme distaste on being instructed to kiss some ugly old lady, you would no doubt have been told in no uncertain terms to straighten up your face. Besides, you may have found it convenient to cultivate a blank or innocent look for purposes of your own. Unlike the face, the rest of the body does not receive the same practice in the art of deception. So while the face may be telling one story, unconscious gestures like the fluttering of the hand, the tapping

of a foot, or jerky body movements may be the giving the true account of what is going on inside.

Long before these gestures of deceit were demonstrated experimentally, Sigmund Freud recognized them for what they were. The author of *Language*, David Thomson (1975), quotes him as having once said, "He who has eyes to see and ears to hear may convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret. If his lips are silent, he chatters with his fingertips; betrayal oozes out of him at every pore." In other words, even if there is no speech and the face refuses to tell, the rest of the body can leak information about the person and what may be happening inside the self. In particular, the hand can doodle involuntarily. It can also *draw* voluntarily. The challenge is to learn how to read what is drawn.

A drawing captures symbolically on paper some of the subject's thoughts and feelings. It makes a portion of the inner self visible. The very lines, timidly, firmly, boldly or savagely drawn, give us some information. More is revealed by the content, which is largely determined by the way the subject, consciously or unconsciously, perceives himself and significant other people in his life.

The important point about this self-revelation is that the drawer does not have to be drawing himself. He may be drawing just "a person" or his teacher or his dentist or members of his family. Unwittingly, he sketches in some details of his own traits, attitudes, behavior characteristics, personality strengths and weaknesses. In other words, he leaves an imprint, however incomplete, of his inner self upon his drawing.

This is true of artists far more sophisticated than the young drawers featured in *Children Draw and Tell*. Consider, for example, William Turner, the English painter of so many superb watercolor landscapes. He depicted people (when he used them at all) either drowned or huddled in thunderstorms or as insignificant specks in the picture. It is interesting to note that he was a gnarled gnome of a man with plain features and keen gray eyes. Taciturn, reclusive, and stingy, he was further burdened with an incurably insane mother. On the contemporary scene, no one looking at the works of Allen Sapp, the noted Saskatchewan Cree Indian painter from our own community, would deny that his cold, snowy, desolate landscapes reflect the rigors of his childhood on the reserve, or that his human figures speak of dignity in hardship, and the Indian way of life as it used to be.

To the astute observer, artists speak eloquently of themselves in pictorial language, just as writers speak in word language and composers in the language of musical sounds. In every case, the work reflects the person. Since drawing also reflects the person, the idea of using it as a