

Working with Children's Drawings
Barbara Patterson
Great Oaks School, Evanston, Illinois

During the Kolisko conference in Sacramento this past August, I attended a five day workshop on the environmental and constitutional influences on the child as expressed in their drawings, particularly the house, tree and person pictures. This workshop was presented by two women from the Netherlands, Christie Amons-Lievegoed, who teaches at the Waldorf Teachers College and Thea Giesen-Huyg, who works at the Zonnehuur Clinic.

We were privileged to be allowed a glimpse of their work as they shared with us the fruits of their study of the drawings of some 300 children over the past years. The aim of this workshop was to help us improve our perceptive ability. In meeting an unknown (to us) child through his or her drawings, we were challenged to build up an image of that child without knowing any information whatsoever about that child.

The first session began by dividing the workshop participants into small groups of four persons each. Each small group was given one drawing. We were to note our observations and later make a small presentation to the whole group. A questionnaire was passed out to each small group outlining the three steps we should follow. These included: What were our first impressions of the drawing? Was the picture drawn from a horizontal or vertical position? What could be observed about the lines, curves, and human figures in the pictures as well as the colors and content? The questionnaire was very detailed. After sharing first in our small group and then presenting to the whole group, we went through a group process of further observations and then went a step further and tried to build up a developmental and psychological sketch of this child just on the basis of the picture. Did we think he/she was small or large headed? Had more or less fantasy? How old did we think the child was? Did we think the child was a boy or a girl, for example?

Near the end of the first session, the workshop leaders revealed to us that five of the pictures were done by one child. They presented biographical information on that child which we compared with the sketches that the group had developed through observation and group discussion. The similarities and differences were interesting to note.

The second session began by looking at the five remaining pictures from the first day's work and discovering that they were also drawn by one child over a two and a half year period. This child's biography was also presented and photographs of the two children were passed around.

The third session included more in depth description of these two children including illnesses, family situations, and psychological aspects. By now we really felt that we had had a meeting with these two children.

Then each group was given six other pictures from a Waldorf school student. They were examples of house, tree, and person drawings from first to seventh grade. Several groups had copies of the same pictures which were all done by two different students. Each group's six pictures were drawn by one student. We were to look for some elements that were repeated over and over in each student's series of pictures that would indicate constitutional elements. In addition, how were developmental changes expressed? What transitions could be imagined as we followed the sequence from one picture to the next and the next, etc.? It was interesting to observe the more technical expression around the nine year old

change and the loneliness that was evident as puberty approached. The biographies of these two boys were shared with us and carried over into the next session.

The last session began with no pictures. We had to try to recall the details of the biographies of these two boys and their drawings from memory. Then the pictures were laid out on the floor for a final look. We all realized the importance of studying more than one drawing when doing an assessment and evaluation on a child.

The workshop drew to a close with a short presentation on the archetypes of different motifs that the children use in their drawings like crowns, hats, etc.

The questions was asked, "Why do we ask the children to draw the house, tree, and person pictures? What do they tell us?" Christie Amons-Lievegoed offered the following brief scheme:

1. The house - a picture of where the child is on earth. From that place the child goes out and comes in again in the process of meeting the world.
2. Tree - indicates the child's connection with his etheric body. We were reminded that Buddha sat under the Bodi tree. The tree is connected with the spiritual world and the earthly world -above and below. It is also a home.
3. Person - shows the human being with an astral body. The house and tree in the pictures also indicate aspects of the human being.

This was an excellent workshop and aroused our interest and intention to deepen this work with children's drawings.