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## **Developmental Stages of Scribbling**

All children all over the world scribble. No matter what chronological age a child starts to scribble, he or she will go through the following developmental stages. The child who starts to scribble at age one, might spend more time in each stage than a child who begins at three. As children move through the developmental stages, there will be times when it seems as though they are in between stages as they leave behind one stage and move into the next.

### **Exploratory Scribbling**

- A child's first experience with a crayon is to explore it with his or her eyes, mouth, and hands. This exploration usually results in practicing what he or she knows how to do, throwing, banging, putting objects away, grabbing, and mouthing.
- The beginning scribbler is just beginning to get acquainted with the drawing tool and is interested in its properties rather than what it can do.
- The random marks on the paper are usually a result of adult encouragement and the innate desire to imitate.
- Marks are often light colored in nature and are the result of banging the drawing tool on paper, dragging, or sweeping.
- Child's attention may be elsewhere as he or she is drawing.

### **Literacy Link**

The very first marks a child makes on paper are the child's first use of a communication tool. These first marks are similar to the first walking steps and should be highly encouraged and praised. It represents the beginning of the child's literacy development.

### **What You Can Do**

To encourage a child at this stage, the adult can show the child how to make marks with the drawing tool on a separate piece of paper. As you demonstrate, do so at the child's level by scribbling and not by drawing a picture. Place a thick pad of newspaper or a placemat under the drawing to ease a smooth application of the crayon on paper. Provide one drawing utensil at a time to help the child focus his or her attention on the process of scribbling instead of the profusion of colors.

## **Disordered Scribbling**

- Lines go back and forth or up and down and are created by using the shoulder rather than the hand or arm movement. These lines can also begin to curve slightly.
- Children's scribble patterns show the understanding of the boundaries of the paper.
- Will start to imitate marks another person has made or choose to draw over someone's marks.

## **What You Can Do**

It is important to give the child plenty of experience in making marks with crayons and paper as well as with finger paint, to satisfy the need to make marks and smear less appropriate materials.

Response to a child's art is an important consideration when looking at children's art. Parent and teacher comments hold great emotional value to the child. As a result, comments should be descriptive and reflective instead of judgmental. For example, "Wow, I saw your whole arm going back and forth to make those lines!"

## **Controlled Scribbling**

- Will start to recognize that the drawing tool makes marks on the paper. These marks please the child and motivate him or her to make more.
- Will be interested in making marks on other surfaces besides paper, foggy mirrors, windowpanes, sand, and snow...
- When given a colored pencil or marker knows which end of the drawing tool works and uses it to accomplish a mark.
- Produce repeated movements on the paper.
- Large areas of energetic scribbling start to create an overall shape regardless of the paper's boundaries.
- Sometimes a noise is produced each time a mark is made.

## **Literacy Link**

Children at the end of this stage have enough muscle control that their scribbles include all the basic twenty scribbles that are depicted in Rhoda Kellogg's book, *Analyzing Children's Art*, and make up the basic written characters of human language.

## **What You Can Do**

Instead of asking, "What is it?" or saying, "It's great!" try to describe what the child is doing, "I see you were using the side of the crayon to make that wide line". Another way of commenting is to talk about what there is to see on the paper, "You covered the whole paper with blue lines!" or "I see loops (as you make a loop in the air) in your drawing". It is helpful to become familiar with Rhoda Kellogg's scribbling "alphabet" to recognize all the different strokes a child can make.

## **Shape Stage**

- Will begin to connect two ends of a line to enclose shapes. These shapes will become circles, squares, and triangles, sometimes filled with color.
- Some children will begin to name their scribbles. These children seem to want to connect the form they perceive on paper with what they know - a long line becomes a train or a road - a circle, a sun.
- Socially, children at this stage want to establish a link with others through drawing. The child might want to give the drawing as a gift to a loved one.

## **Literacy Link**

Susan Striker writes in her book, *Young at Art*, “This use of lines and shapes as symbols for other things is the bridge leading to symbol recognition and formation used in reading and writing. It stands to reason that the more experience a child has in dealing with producing art, the easier learning to read and write will be later on.”

Viktor Lowenfeld writes in *Creative and Mental Growth*, “This naming of scribbling is of the highest significance, for it is an indication that the child’s thinking has changed. Before this stage he was satisfied with the motions themselves, but now he has connected his motions to the world around him. He has changed from a kinesthetic thinking in terms of motions to an imaginative thinking in terms of pictures.”

## **What You Can Do**

It is important not to label the child’s scribbles at this stage because what is a train one day can become a road another day. This mental connection of naming is a child’s early attempts at linking symbols to meaning. Instead, you can help stimulate the child’s imaginative thinking by asking some questions about the subject he or she just named, “This is Mommy” can be responded to with “Is your Mommy tall?” “Does she have long hair?” “Does she feel soft when you hug her?” “Does your Mommy make you yummy things to eat?” The purpose is not to have the child improve his or her drawing but rather approach a subject using all of his or her senses.

It is also important to let the child decide when the scribbling is finished even though the adult might want to whisk it away in an attempt to “save the masterpiece before it gets ruined”. In these instances, the child will not understand why his or her scribbling was interrupted.

## **Design Stage**

- Uses more defined muscle control and shows a greater understanding of symmetry and order in the world around him.
- Takes the shapes he has learned and combines them.
- Creates “Mandalas”. Mandala is the Sanskrit word for “magic circle”. It is one of the most sacred forms in the world. All religions have mandalas. As a

meditation, the Tibetan monks create mandala's out of colored sand. The Greek cross is a type of mandala. Mandalas can be circles or squares with intersecting lines often dividing them into quarters or eighths. Concentric circles are also mandalas.

- Suns and radials are formed. Such a circle with radiating lines is a natural scribble for all children. It is derived from earlier images in a child's scribbling. The adult perceives it as a sun but for the child it is first a design that is perfectly balanced with order. Suns usually show up after a child turns three. A radial formation has lines radiating from a specific point. It is the basis for making arms and legs on people.
- Explores mandalas, suns, and radials in depth and become the basis for making people and early animals.

### **What You Can Do**

To point out what you see you might say, "I see so many different kinds of circles on your paper" or "I see all your lines come from here." Remember to encourage without directing the child's drawing, naming or helping.

## **Representational Stage**

- Draws basic people consisting of a round form, inner shapes that become the eyes and two lines radiating from the circle, which become arms.
- Uses the basic form of a person to become a car, a bug, or a cat.
- Makes general representations. A child doesn't draw his or her dog, but just a "dog".
- As the stage progresses, details will start appearing in the people.
- Later representations include drawing more than one side, creating x-ray drawings, which show the interior of an object, and organizing objects into scenes.

### **What You Can Do**

Susan Striker in her book, *Young at Art* states that, "When trying to think of helpful comments to make, remember that by simply describing the activity or picture, you are being very helpful because you are providing the child with an awareness of the causes and effects of his or her actions, and you are stimulating language development by adding to the child's vocabulary." In her book she lists seven areas that the teacher or parent can consider when making comments.

They are:

- 1) How the child's actions affect the picture
- 2) How color is used
- 3) The type of line that is used
- 4) How the work differs from previous work
- 5) The way a tool is being used
- 6) Pressure of the hand on the tool
- 7) How the child feels when working

## **Literacy Link**

Representational drawing is the foundation for storytelling. Start by listening to the children's stories as they draw and asking them if they would like you to write down their stories. Once children have established the pattern of drawing and storytelling, you can begin to scaffold their writing by leaving a few words out of the dictation and encouraging the child to write them in. From there, the child should be encouraged to do his or her own writing of the story.

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