

Crayoning - Blocks or Sticks A Beginning Research
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Drawings in early childhood are an expression of the physical and spiritual growth processes which a child is experiencing. In *Understanding Children's Drawings*, Michaela Strauss states that, "Formative processes... underlie the most varied organs and... determine the structuring of muscles and bones... In the child's drawing, the shape appears to form itself out of processes governed by the laws of growth." (page 16)

In the first seven years, the drawings follow a progression of form, from the earliest whorls and spirals, to a circle, to circles with crosses, ladders, "tree men", and on to other forms which represent the consolidation of the incarnating ego of the child into the physical body. Developmental milestones have their counterparts in children's drawings -- the "archetypal" forms.

There was anecdotal evidence at Acorn Hill that the archetypal forms in the drawings observed over time were becoming more attenuated, harder to find and less clear. Concurrently, we heard from Ingun Schneider (a remedial specialist in California) about the development of a proper pencil grip in children, and the vital role practice and movement have in this.

We learned something of the history of the use of block crayons, which we had been using exclusively in the kindergarten for many years. Block crayons were developed in the 1960's in Northern Germany, by two Waldorf art teachers, to provide sweeping areas of color, for use by children in 4th grade and up. This age child can work with block crayons in a controlled way, and has good enough control of the fingers and wrists to do beautiful work.

A move away from the block crayons, which we had been using, to stick crayons was advocated and Acorn Hill began a one-year experiment using stick crayons in its five classrooms. Some classrooms offered the children only stick crayons, other classrooms offered both blocks and sticks. Teachers agreed to look at one aspect of the change and report back to the faculty: breakage and peeling in stick crayons, interest in crayoning, images and grips.

In one mixed-age classroom, offering only sticks, crayoning had taken place once a week, with all the children participating. Interest in crayoning has been high, and for the most part, children came willingly to the table. Some children colored for a long time and with great focus. A copy record of the children's drawings was made so that changes in image over time could be seen; and also so the drawings of the children using sticks this year could be compared to the small sample of drawings' from similar-aged children using blocks last year.

Although each child is different, a block of drawings of last year's 5 year old children shows, in general, less differentiated activity of line and form than do this year's drawings done with sticks. Using stick crayons, we have seen this year that there are three who consistently use "unusual" crayon grips; two of these children are five and one is six years old. No attempt has been made to "correct" or change their grips. Watching the progress of these children as they pass through the grades might be instructive.

There is certainly room for more, and more varied, information on the topic of block and stick crayons, and different questions might be asked. Kindergarten teachers with observations or thoughts on this topic may write to *Gateways* or to Kate Gage, 4001 Garrison Street, NW, Washington, DC 20016.