

Disturbances in the Child's Relationship to Inner and Outer Pictures of Reality

Two pediatricians from a German municipal health office studied the capacity for pictorial perception among two thousand preschool children ages five and six prior to school entrance. In order to determine the children's cognitive maturity and their pictorial perception and reproduction abilities in particular, they administered the so-called *draw-a-person test*, in which the children were to draw pictures of a person. The drawings were later evaluated by the pediatric medical doctors according to specific criteria, e.g. head-torso relationship, number of fingers on each hand, dynamic or static quality of the drawing, depiction of eyes and noses, and so forth. In this manner, it was possible to distinguish high-performing from low-performing children in each of the tested areas. The children's scores were then compared to their average daily consumption of television and (in row C, below) to the daily extent of their "passive smoking," that is, the number of cigarettes smoked by their mothers and fathers in the children's presence. The following illustrations indicate alarming indications:

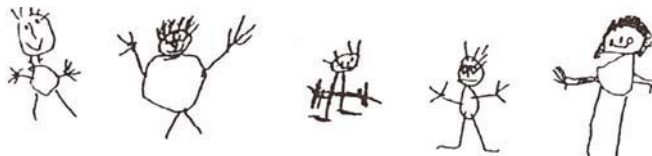
- A. Drawings by children who watched little to no television and were not smokers



- B Drawings by children who watched more than three hours of television a day:



- C Drawings by children who watched more than three hours of television and were "passive smokers":



- D Drawings by children (not included in the study) with severe psychological or soul disturbances:



Frequent television viewing appears to lead to a significant retardation of the development of comprehension, a negative effect compounded by simultaneous passive smoking. In addition, certain visual perceptive abilities – and related cognitive development – appear to atrophy or be hindered by frequent television viewing and/or excessive video-game playing. The two medical doctors came to the conclusion that the rapid succession of images on the TV screen disrupts the child's perceptive ability to behold or view with attention; as a result, the development of an inner picturing process is prevented. The children are unable to inwardly picture (or "grasp") reality. The drawings in Row D were created by children with severe psychological or soul disturbances, who were not included in the regular studies; they suffered from family conflicts, divorce/custody proceedings, traumatic experiences, and so forth. The fact that Rows A through C successively approximate the images in Figure D is an indication of the emotional side-effects among children who watch a significant amount of television and are "passive smokers."

This edited and condensed research report can be found in Christian Rittelmeyer, *Kindheit in Bedrängnis*, Kohlhammerverlag, Stuttgart, 2007, pp. 78–80. The research study by the two medical doctors, P. Winterstein and R. Jungwirth from the Göppingen, Germany Health Office, is published in: *Der Kinder- und Jugendarzt* Nr. 37/ 2006. Rittelmeyer's recent research, "The Advantage and Disadvantage of Brain Research for Pedagogy" will be published in *Waldorf Journal Project, Number 12* in the autumn of 2008.