

Learning Processes

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How to Use this Course

There are two manuals in this course: *The Heart of Learning* and *Learning Processes*. *The Heart of Learning* explains in greater detail why we suggest the processes in this course. We want to help you understand better the needs of your child so that your experience as a parent can be as enjoyable as possible.

It is important that you read the following in *The Heart of Learning* as soon as you receive this course. This will give you the basic understanding necessary to proceed with the course. Read the remainder of *The Heart of Learning* at your leisure, but an understanding of the following sections in *The Heart of Learning* is necessary for a fuller understanding of *Learning Processes*.

Chapter 1: *The Nature of Children*

Chapter 6: *Rhythm and Learning*

Chapter 12: *Creating Boundaries and Clear Communication*

Learning Processes contains a description of the many processes that bring fullness and richness to a young child's life. It is important to read the following before beginning:

“Guidelines for Creative Processes”

“Morning Circle”

“Imitation Activities”

“Creative Play”

“The Bedtime Ritual”

Once you have read these, you are ready to create a daily structure that breathes comfortably with your child's natural rhythm. The remainder of this introduction describes such a daily structure.

The Structure of a Young Child's Day

The young child needs lots of freedom to explore and express creatively. At the same time, there need to be special moments throughout the day when the parent shifts the focus from expansion to contraction and back again. When a child is contracted or expanded for too long a period of time, he or she becomes restless and irritable. It is very helpful to have a basic outline of a child's day to allow for an easier flow between expansion and contraction. We suggest the following:

- **Breakfast (Expansion):** Have a consistent rising time and breakfast time so your child establishes a rhythm to the day. There will always be exceptions, but generally a child should get up and eat breakfast at about the same time each day.
- **Circle Time (Contraction):** After the child has completed the morning routine of eating and dressing, create a Circle Time to bring about a reverence as well as a bond between parent and child. There is a full description of Circle Time in this manual.
- **Shared Experiences (Alternating Polarities):** After a period of focus, as established during the Circle Time, the child needs to work through his or her will. Will is discussed in *The Heart of Learning* under the section called "Cycles of Unfoldment." This is the perfect time for imitation activities as described in "Imitation Activities" in this manual.
- **Creative Play (Expansion):** Creative play opportunities can finish the morning until it is time to focus again upon lunch. This frees the parent for his or her personal activities.
- **Lunch (Contraction):** Come together with your child to focus on the lunch ritual as described in this manual.

- **Shared Experiences (Alternating Polarities):** After the lunch period is a good time for a special activity. There are many to choose from in this manual. The important consideration is that you share the experience with your child. Remember it does not need to take all afternoon, and you both need time to be separately engaged in your own activities.
- **Creative Play (Expansion):** Creative play activities give both of you some independent time.
- **Evening Meal (Contraction):** Come together for the evening meal ritual.
- **Creative Play (Expansion):** More creative play.
- **Bedtime Ritual (Contraction):** The bedtime ritual is a special time to share with your child. Bedtime should be a set time each day, and your child will look forward to it. Many of the bedtime struggles are eliminated with this ritual. In addition to spending an hour with your child at bedtime, you are giving yourself several personal hours for the rest of the evening. A child who goes off to sleep peacefully does not usually wake up and demand more attention.

Read the remainder of both manuals slowly and thoughtfully so you can digest the material at your own pace. You will probably want to read over the material at least twice if it is new to you.

Chapter 1



Guidelines for Creative Processes

In choosing activities as focal points for the experience of process, it makes a tremendous difference what we choose to focus upon. Parents and children have always done “creative arts” together, and there are countless books available that demonstrate how to do an infinite number of crafts projects. Any of these projects could be used as a focus for a process, but some are more beneficial than others. It is important to know which kinds of activities provide greater opportunities for a deeper experience and which are extremely limited in the opportunities they offer.

Of course, here we are talking about outer activities, which are only part of what goes into a meaningful learning experience. Although it is certainly important that we choose activities that offer greater opportunities for expression, we must never forget that the real key to the success or failure of any such experience between parent and child lies within the parent, and not within the project.

If the parent is truly capable of entering into a process with his or her child, any activity will do, including the most mundane, for it is the amount of loving awareness flowing through the parent and child which determines the depth they will experience, and not the specific activity they engage in. Each of us sometimes struggles with pouring ourselves wholeheartedly into activities with our children, and we are not always filled with love or awareness. Therefore, we must consider what kinds of activities are more helpful than others. Certain kinds of activities actually have the ability to draw parents and children into a deeper experience, even when they’re not feeling up to it, while other activities, by their very nature, seem to thwart the very possibility of deeper

experience. There are several components which are common to activities that provide opportunities for deeper expression. Some activities have all of these elements, while others have only one or two. Having more of these components does not necessarily make it a better activity than those with fewer of them, but for an activity to offer real opportunities for deeper expression, it must have at least one of these elements present:

• ***The Activity Is Rhythmical***

This must be understood in a broad sense, and does not mean the activity must include drums beating in the background, or only involve singing and dancing. Rhythm has to do with the repetition of a particular motion numerous times, eventually resulting in a finished activity. This includes such activities as knitting, sewing, weaving, singing, dancing, swinging and running. The repetition of a particular action creates an opportunity for focus not available in other, more erratic activities. It offers the mind and body an activity which is steady, consistent, and non-threatening (because it is familiar), and this permits them to become still. This allows the heart, which is the gateway to the experience of process, to open. In activities that are not rhythmical, the mind is faced with having to constantly make a new decision, and this keeps the attention focused in the analytical mind, rather than freeing it to become poised and still.

• ***The Activity Is Creative***

This includes such activities as clay modeling, painting and drawing, building with blocks, and playing with sand or water. In these activities, there is a flexible medium present which allows the child to give form to an inner impulse. Such an activity widens and strengthens the channel between the child's inner nature and his or her physical expression. This enables the child to more fully express his or her innate abilities through the physical manipulation of materials.

It is important to mention the significance of the particular medium which is used in the creative process, for this influences the nature of the experience. As we mentioned before, if the parent is capable of entering fully into the experience of the process, any medium can be used. However, since we are

all limited in this respect, it is helpful to use a medium which tends to encourage, rather than discourage, a deeper experience. Generally, media which are softer and more receptive (poetically speaking) tend to be more conducive to a deeper experience than those that are harsh and brittle. Usually, this corresponds to natural instead of artificial materials. For example, if you are doing a modeling project, clay or homemade bread dough would be better than commercial Play-doh. If you are drawing, crayons generally are more flexible than magic markers. Natural colors are more conducive to a deeper expression than “day-glo” colors, and wood is more “alive” than plastic.

- ***The Activity Embodies Archetypes***

The concept of archetypes was originally formulated by Plato, and basically suggests that all physical forms and activities are actually reflections of deeper realities (which Plato called archetypes), in much the same way as the image we see in a mirror is not the reality itself, but a reflection of that reality. By observing the events that occur in the world from this perspective, we can begin to understand and experience the deeper realities that lie behind these forms. We will go into greater depth about the concept of archetypes in the section on storytelling, so if you wish to read more about them now, turn to that section.

These are the three important elements of a creative process. If a process contains these components there is a very good chance the activity will be both beneficial and enjoyable for the parent and the child. Even with the very best activity, the most important aspect of any process is the amount of focused responsiveness which exists between the parent and the child, because this is what creates a sensitive relationship and opens the door for deeper communication.

Chapter 2



Morning Circle

Young children love rhythm and repetition. It is very helpful to start each day with a focused time, which we call Circle Time, because it creates a circle or bond between parent and child. We suggest the following format:

- 1. Light a candle to bring about a sense of reverence or specialness.**
- 2. Say the Beginning Verse; your child will imitate as you say it over several times.**
- 3. Say a Movement Verse and do the movements together. It is important to use the same verse for many days or even several weeks. Children love and respond to repetition. Add new verses, but go back to old verses frequently.**
- 4. Close with the Closing or Centering Verse, and then blow the candle out.**

This short morning ritual creates a strong bond of love and starts the day off by deepening the relationship and bringing the parent and child to a point of focus together. Begin each day with the same verse, vary the movement verses, and close with the same verse. Children love repetition.

Following are some suggestions for verses:

BEGINNING VERSE:

I awake from my sleep. (Begin bent over - come to upright)

I stretch to the sky. (Reach up - arms spread wide over head, legs together)

I jump to the light. (Jump up - legs out. Arms still overhead widely)

I am ready to greet the new day. (Jump back to standing straight and with arms down)

(Remember that for children of this age, learning is primarily imitative. Simply model the verse and gestures for them and they will follow. Don't insist that your child repeat and memorize the verses - just enjoy sharing them with him or her.)

MOVEMENT VERSES:

(Sing, move and use fingerplays with these verses.)

Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,

How I wonder what you are.

Up above the world so high,

Like a diamond in the sky.

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,

How I wonder what you are.

Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear

**Teddy bear, teddy bear,
Touch the ground.
Teddy bear, teddy bear,
Turn around.
Teddy bear, teddy bear,
Show your shoe.
Teddy bear, teddy bear,
That will do.
Teddy bear, teddy bear,
Run upstairs.
Teddy bear, teddy bear,
Say your prayers.
Teddy bear, teddy bear,
Blow out the light.
Teddy bear, teddy bear,
Say good night**

Heads and Shoulders

(Touch each part of the body as you say the verse.)

**Heads and shoulders,
Knees and toes
Knees and toes.**

**Heads and shoulders,
Knees and toes
Knees and toes.**

**Eyes and ears,
Mouth and nose,
Mouth and nose.**

**Eyes and ears,
Mouth and nose,
Mouth and nose.**

**Heads and shoulders,
Knees and toes,
Knees and toes!**

Ring A-round the Roses

(UK Version:)

**Ring a-round the roses, A pocket full of posies,
A-tishoo! A-tishoo!
We all fall down!**

(The American version is:)

**Ring a-round the roses,
A pocket full of posies,
Ashes! Ashes!
We all fall down!**

Little Bo Peep

**Little Bo Peep has lost her sheep
And can't tell where to find them.
Leave them alone,
And they'll come home,
Wagging their tails behind them.**

Chapter 6



Nature Walk

Go for a walk in a natural setting with your child. This area may be on the beach, in the woods, along a creek, in the mountains, or any other natural area. If you live in a very large city and there are no natural areas nearby, then go to a park, but try to choose an area that is not crowded with people. The idea is to be in a place that is not surrounded by all of the distractions that usually assault you every day.

Walk for about an hour. You don't need to walk briskly, and you don't need to see how far you can walk. As far as your child is concerned, there is no "purpose" to the walk; you are just "going for a walk" together. While you are walking, keep your attention, (and your child's), focused upon the sights and sounds around you, and not upon other things, such as conversations about what happened yesterday or what you are planning to do tomorrow. As much as possible, try to use all of your bodily senses: sight, touch, taste, smell and hearing. Touch trees. Feel the bark, the roots, the leaves, the berries. Listen to the sound of the wind, the birds, and the bees. Look at the shapes of flowers, seeds and leaves. Smell the earth, the grass, the flowers and the sap on the trees. Try to experience nature through all of your senses, and help your child do the same.

Don't try to make a big issue of "paying attention," or it will tend to make the walk rather tiresome for both you and your child. Whenever something comes up that begins to move away from the intention, just "shift the focus," as described in *The Heart of Learning*. The only exception to this rule is if your child feels compelled to talk about something which has been bothering him or her. Then allow him or her to express what is felt, but don't go into laborious mental questionings. Just allow it to come out, acknowledge your child's thoughts and feelings, and then shift the focus to something tangible and present.

Chapter 17



Nature Stories

What we call “nature stories” are stories that might be told to a very young child - usually three to five years old, but occasionally as old as six or seven - based on actual events that occur in nature.

Learning to tell nature stories is not difficult, provided you have two essential traits. First, you need a sense of wonder and reverence for the mysteries of nature, and second, you need a desire to share your wonder with your children. If you don't have those traits, your first step is to stop whatever it is you are doing that seems so important and look at the natural world around you. Walk outside and look at the deep blue of the sky, unfathomable in its depths. Or, if it's raining, feel the water falling on your face and hands, bringing new life to the thirsty grass beneath your feet. Walk over to the nearest tree and look closely at a leaf, following the subtlety of the colors and imagining the long journey of water from the roots to the leaf. Or reach down and touch the earth on which you walk every day. Feel the texture of the soil and marvel at the countless creatures which live and move on its surface and within its depths. Nature stories can be made from just such simple elements as these. The plot doesn't have to be complicated. In fact, if the story is complex it will detract from the sense of wonder which should pervade the story. In general, nature stories can be created from almost any aspect of the world of nature - and the simpler the story, the better. Possibilities for stories include:

- **The beginning and end of a rainstorm**
- **The cycle of growth of a seed**
- **The building of a bird's nest**
- **The blossoming of a flower**

- **The yearly cycle of a tree**
- **The changing of the seasons**

As you can see, the suggestions given all involve processes of nature. This is because it is easier to create a story around something that has movement and growth than around something which is static. The most important element in a nature story is the feeling of wonder at the mystery of it all. You don't have to create imaginary characters or clever dialogue; just relate what happens in a way that has meaning. For example, if you were to tell a story about the growth cycle of a seed it might sound something like this:

“Let me tell you about the most amazing thing in the world. Do you know what happens to an apple when it falls off a tree? It lies on the ground and the sun shines on it and the rain falls on it and birds and insects begin to eat it. Lots of little creatures enjoy the apple and gobble it all up, leaving only some tiny bits. These tiny bits are very special. They are called the seeds.

The seed is the part in the very center of the apple; a little tiny hard thing that is magical. The reason it is so magical is that from the tiny little seed a whole apple tree filled with hundreds of apples can grow. Just from that one tiny seed! But before that can happen, something special has to take place. The seed has to lie on the ground and be heated by the sun and soaked by the rains until finally the earth covers it completely so you can't even see it anymore. By that time, it usually is winter outside. The air is cold, the snow may be falling, but the seed is safe, down in the earth, protected from all that goes on above.

And in that darkness, when all seems to be lost, when the seed is hidden away in the earth, the magical thing starts happening. Somewhere from within that seed life begins to move. And very slowly the seed begins to swell and grow. Then the seed splits open and a tiny little sprout begins to rise up toward the light above. It struggles hard, day after day, pushing earth out of the way and reaching for the light.

Then, one day, it breaks through the soil and feels the warmth of the sun and the cool breezes blowing. Now it is spring. Days go by and the little sprout grows bigger and bigger in the sun and rain. After years and years of growing, the little sprout that was once just a tiny seed becomes a big apple tree, with many, many juicy apples hanging from its branches.”

Of course, that same story could be told in countless ways, but the essence will always be the same. In telling such stories, try to tell it in an archetypal form, using symbols of light and darkness or birth and death instead of complex theories such as photosynthesis. As children become accustomed to viewing things in this manner, they will develop a deeper way of looking at the events of the world, and won't be as easily blinded by the apparent complexities of life.

By sharing your reverence for the mysteries of nature, you will be helping children to slowly grow in understanding of these processes and deepen in love for the beauty of life.

Chapter 23



Interpreting Children's Art

One of the most wonderful aspects of children is their ability to express themselves freely and openly. In everything they do and say, they tell us a lot about how they are feeling, if only we use our eyes to see and ears to hear. This is particularly true of their drawings and paintings. When children are engaged in artistic activities, they very graphically express their momentary joys and conflicts, but also reveal patterns reflecting deeper situations which can affect their overall growth and development. Developing the ability to interpret children's art can be a great help to parents. It provides them with clues to help their children more fully express their individuality as they mature.

Of course, to some extent, all art (whether created by children or adults) reflects the inner state of the artist. However, young children are less able than adults to objectify the outer world and hide their inner feelings. As adults, we have the ability to look at a scene in our environment and paint it objectively, completely separate from the way we feel inside. We may not choose to do this, but we have that ability, because we have a center of self-awareness we can separate from our thoughts and feelings. Young children don't have this, and their lack of self-awareness causes them to, in some fashion, become whatever they experience. Because of this tendency, what you see in a child's drawing or painting is a pretty accurate reflection of what he or she is experiencing at that moment.

There are numerous books on analyzing children's art, but these are necessarily quite involved, and tend to revolve around a lot of psychological concepts such as id, ego, superego, anima, animus, and others. For researchers who are intent upon exploring specific aspects of childhood psychology, this approach may be very helpful. However, for most parents, unless they happen to be professional psychologists, viewing children's art in these terms often

serves to confuse, rather than clarify, the issues involved. In this present context, we are not trying to introduce complex theories of child psychology, but rather to create a simple framework which will allow parents to gain some measure of understanding of their children's art, and to be able to use this understanding in ways that can be of benefit to their children.

Parents may feel somewhat inadequate when faced with a subject such as this, because they believe they don't have enough specific training in this area. The primary requirement for interpreting children's art is not an accumulation of knowledge, but awareness and sensitivity. Most parents have already begun to hone these skills through the process of parenting. Even though further experience may be necessary if one is to explore all of the subtleties of art interpretation, the basics can be understood quite easily. These basic principles, along with awareness and sensitivity already mentioned, are all that is needed to enable most parents to shed a little light on their children's artistic expressions.

Every drawing or painting has three basic elements: Content, color and composition. Let's begin by exploring some of the considerations involved in these three basic elements; then we will discuss a few guidelines to help you interpret your children's drawings and paintings.

- ***Content***

The content of a picture is usually the first thing you notice. It's the subject of the picture. When you say to a child, "That's beautiful! What is it?" you're asking about the content. The content of a picture is a very direct expression of the child's state of mind at the time he drew the picture, because it is the image that occurred to her when she decided to draw. When you are angry, you don't usually see images of bright sunrises or peaceful lakes, you see images of battles, storms, collisions or monsters. Thus, the content of a picture tells a lot about a child's emotional state at that moment.

Very young children often don't convey their feelings through content as much as through the quality of the composition, the choice of colors and the amount of order in the picture. However, children older than three will often draw specific forms, and these forms are significant. In general, the forms which are used can be viewed as archetypal symbols, and interpreted from that perspective. If you don't remember very much about archetypes, please review the explanation given previously in the section titled "Storytelling."

We must always be careful about assigning specific meanings to forms, because children are never that predictable, and art interpretation is an art, not a science. It would be very easy if we could just say, for example, that if a child draws a battle scene, it indicates he is experiencing a battle within himself. Or if he draws a picture of a boat sinking in the midst of the ocean, it indicates he feels overcome by an emotional situation in his environment. Or mountains indicate he is beginning to experience a greater self-awareness, or that landscapes or happy family scenes indicate contentment. In general, one could say these statements do contain an element of truth, but you must be careful not to base an interpretation strictly upon the content. Take into consideration other elements occurring at the time the picture is being created, and the child's expressed mood as he shows the picture to you.

In addition to these archetypal subjects, children often draw pictures of scenes in their environment. These can tell a parent a lot about the child's perceptions about herself or other family members. For example, children frequently draw pictures of all the family members grouped together. Some of the family members may appear sad, or some may be drawn very large or very small, and all of these elements have significance which can be discovered when parents talk to the child about each of the family members. In fact, if you have a five to seven-year-old child, a good way for you to discover more about her experience of the family is to ask her to draw a picture of the family, then talk to her about it. Ask her to describe each person and why they appear as they do in the picture. The same thing occurs when a child draws a picture of a house. When asked to draw a picture of his house, a child (particularly one in the first stage of unfoldment), will rarely draw a house that resembles his own house in a physical sense. What he will draw is his experience of the house, and this experience is necessarily subjective, because he doesn't have the ability to be objective at this stage. Thus, the house which he draws will be a reflection of

himself, and the various parts of the house, such as windows, doors, the number of floors, the type of roof etc., all tell something about the way he experiences himself and his environment. If the house is very big and bright, with lots of doors and windows, it would tend to indicate that he feels good about himself and experiences a lot of freedom to communicate with others and move about in his environment. On the other hand, if the house is small and dark, with very few windows or doors, or the windows are all closed, it may indicate that he isn't very happy about himself or his environment, he feels unable to communicate or express himself, or that he feels confined and limited. If the house has three floors and he mentions he lives on the top floor, but there is no stairway down to the bottom, he may be saying he's having a difficult time connecting or feeling a part of his environment.

By communicating with your child about the content of her pictures, you will gradually develop a greater understanding of the significance of various aspects of her pictures, and you will also provide opportunities for her to talk about her concerns and resolve them before they become serious problems.

• *Color*

Assuming that a child has a wide choice of colors available, the parent can tell a lot about the child's emotional state by observing the choice of colors and the amount of color is used in the drawings. There are many points of view about the significance of various colors, but these perspectives tend to be subjective, and not always consistent. The most balanced approach is to encourage your child to use a variety of colors, comment (non-judgmentally) about his choice of colors, and be aware of any particular colors your child uses consistently. By simply becoming aware of your child's color preferences, and sharing that awareness with him in non-threatening ways, ("You really like red, don't you?"), you can open the door for some interesting and often revealing conversations about color and his feelings about them. Simple conversations like these will provide you with more real insights about his use of color than trying to memorize the "meanings" of various colors from someone else's experiences.

There is one aspect of color usage, however, which is more predictable, and it concerns patterns of light and dark colors. If a child is cheerful and contented, she will generally tend to choose bright, clear colors: yellows, blues, reds, clear greens, etc. However, if she is troubled or confused, she will tend to choose dark, muddy colors; mixed browns and greens, mixed reds and blacks, solid blacks, etc. Of course, even a cheerful child will use muddy colors occasionally, just as an angry or upset child will certainly use a bright color now and then. The important thing to observe here is the overall pattern, and not the infrequent or chaotic picture. If dark, muddy colors seem to predominate in your child's pictures, and if the composition or content of the picture seems chaotic, begin to watch for other signs of emotional turmoil, and look for opportunities to provide outlets for the expression and resolution of these conflicts.

- ***Composition***

The composition of a picture is the way in which the content is presented and arranged on the page. The composition of a picture tells more about the nature of the child than any other element. Thus, it is important for us to explore this particular aspect more thoroughly. There are two basic aspects of the child's nature which are reflected in the composition of a drawing: awareness and integration.

Awareness of form - When a child is first conceived, he is in a relatively formless state. By the time he is twenty-one years old, he will be quite involved and concerned with the tangible, concrete world. Thus, the essential movement of the child through all the stages of growth, is toward the world of form, and this movement coincides with the child's awareness of form. This progression in the awareness of form is very apparent in children's artwork. Drawings by younger children are often only splashes of color, with virtually no attention to the shape, but drawings by adolescents reflect a real awareness of form and a concern with drawing it accurately.

Since this movement toward form coincides with the child's awareness of tangible reality, the amount of detail in the picture indicates the child's capacity for focused awareness. "Detail" can appear in many ways. The figures may be very small, or they may have eyes, ears, noses and mouths, or there may be lots of individually drawn little flowers or leaves on trees, or signs with writing on them. Or, the drawing itself may be quite simple, but the shading of the colors may show a lot of attention to detail. Whatever the particular expression may be, if it demonstrates a lot of attention given to detail, then this reflects a developing awareness of form.

The amount of awareness which a child can manifest is dependent upon the degree of mental focus which has been established. Thus, the amount of detail we see in a child's picture tells us the extent to which he is beginning to focus mentally. This has little meaning **unless we relate it to** the child's age and his stage in the maturing process, for a lack of mental focus that would be entirely appropriate for a child of three might indicate an imbalance for a child of seven. A drawing that is somewhat scattered and lacking in details is natural for a child of three, because at this age a child shouldn't be expected to develop a strong mental focus. If a child of three consistently draws pictures that are very detailed, it indicates a premature development of mental focus and self-awareness. Parents of such a child should refrain from activities that are mentally stimulating, and provide more opportunity for activities of a physical or feeling nature, to help the child restore the balance.

If a child of seven draws a picture that is very scattered and lacking in any detail, this indicates that he has not developed very much mental focus or self-awareness, which should naturally have begun to occur to some degree at this stage of his or her growth. To restore the child's balance, the parents should provide additional opportunities in the child's life for order, structure, and activities that are mentally stimulating, to increase the degree of mental focus and self-awareness.

In all of these recommendations, it must be understood that the objective is always to help children integrate and balance all of the different parts of themselves - mind, feelings, and body - as they progress through the stages of development, rather than becoming unbalanced or overdeveloped in one area, for this inevitably causes difficulties as the child matures.

Integration - This is the second aspect of the child's nature which is reflected in the composition of her drawings. For an adult, integration encompasses physical, emotional and mental faculties, but for a child in the first stage of unfoldment, integration can be defined as the extent to which the child is able to focus her awareness in the physical realm. This is the child's primary work during this cycle, and by the time she has reached the change of teeth, she should have begun to develop this ability to a fair degree.

The degree of integration is apparent in a child's drawing by the amount of order and balance she brings to the overall picture. Generally, if a child is not integrated, she will tend to scatter her picture all over the page, or to use just the top, bottom, or one corner of the page. A child who is more integrated will use the entire page, and will arrange the figures on the page in a balanced manner. In addition, the more integrated a child is, the more she will tend to color the entire page, instead of just coloring parts of the picture and leaving blank spots throughout.

Generally, the drawings and paintings of children in the first stage of unfoldment will be quite simple, and will contain little form, as such. Drawings of children between three and five are usually diffuse and scattered; most figures will lack eyes, ears, or noses, and the body shapes will be out of proportion. The elements in the picture are often disconnected. This reflects the child's basic identification with life instead of form. However, children between five and seven begin to show a much greater awareness of form, and their drawings usually begin to show the

first signs of integration. The figures are more complete, and the elements of the picture are more connected. The pictures still have a somewhat scattered feeling, although not nearly as much as before. Overall, the pictures are beginning to convey a sense of order and balance, replacing the feeling of chaos which existed in the earlier drawings. Of course, compared with drawings which the child will complete in adolescence, these first-stage drawings are generally still very simple and two dimensional, without any real signs of sophistication.

These two elements reflected in the composition of a drawing, *awareness of form* and *integration*, do not always develop in a balanced manner. Sometimes a drawing may be very balanced and orderly, but the forms themselves may be quite simple, with very little detail. This would indicate that a child is integrating fully as he unfolds, and is bringing all of the awareness he has gained into focus in the physical realm. In a situation such as this, the child could easily encompass activities that are more mentally stimulating, to develop a greater awareness of form. If a child is capable of drawing very detailed figures, but is not able to create order or balance in his drawings, this would indicate his awareness of form is developing faster than his ability to integrate, and he would probably benefit from physical activities which would help him to integrate some of his awareness.

This completes our overview of the basic elements of drawings and paintings. Now let's review some of the important principles we have covered and consider a few guidelines for interpreting children's art.

- ***Consider The Child's Individuality***

This is the most important guideline of all. You can only interpret a drawing in relation to a child's individual nature and his point in the unfoldment process. What might indicate a need for more mental focus in one child could indicate a need for less focus in another. Don't compare children's pictures on any kind of absolute basis. Every child is unique.

• ***Don't Get Lost In The Details***

The only way to perceive the significance of a picture is to look at the pattern, and not get lost in the details. Often, this insight into the pattern occurs when you first look at the picture, and not after you have studied it extensively. For example, your first impression may be that the picture is extremely chaotic and scattered. That conveys the underlying pattern. The fact that some of the characters in the picture may be very detailed doesn't change the overall chaotic pattern, but it may shed further insight into the underlying cause of the pattern.

Look at all of the aspects of the picture: the content, the color and the composition, and also consider what you know about your child and the circumstances of the picture. For example, if your child doesn't generally draw many battle scenes, don't get upset because he happens to draw one battle scene; it doesn't mean he is filled with conflict, or is a raging inferno about to erupt. He may have just seen a violent movie or television program, or perhaps was drawing along with a friend, who happened to be more aggressive at that time, or perhaps he had been playing a game about knights or cowboys. Remember, when a child experiences a disharmony between the inner and the outer, he is compelled to restore the harmony, and this usually occurs by expressing outwardly what he feels inwardly. Once he has done this, the balance is restored, and he can then return to his natural state. If the child does not normally draw battle scenes, he may just need to draw a very violent picture to re-establish his inner balance. However, if a child constantly draws battle scenes, it is an indication that something more is going on, and you should begin to consider what is happening.

Peaceful pictures are not automatically wonderful, either. If a child continuously draws the same picture, even though it may be a very peaceful picture, this usually indicates the child is frozen emotionally, and unless this is resolved, will erupt at some point in the future. Remember, we are only using the tangible manifestations of our child's art to help us perceive the life behind those forms. So **do** consider the forms - but **don't** be deceived by them. Look for the life.

- ***Don't Judge The Picture As "Good" Or "Bad"***

If you look at pictures with an eye as to whether they are "good" or "bad," you will never be able to perceive the message they contain. Every picture conveys a message, but usually you have to be detached and objective to see it. This doesn't mean you have to become very clinical about all of your children's pictures, or that you have to stop appreciating their lovely simplicity. Appreciate them for what they are, but take the time to see them clearly. Also, don't tell your children that certain kinds of pictures are "bad," or encourage them to only draw "nice" pictures. Drawing is a very important channel of communication for children, and by judging their drawings in this way, you very effectively limit their ability to express to you what they feel, or to express it in any way at all.

- ***Talk To Them About Their Pictures***

This is the very best way to gain an understanding of the significance of your child's drawings. However, it is very important to convey a non-judgmental attitude when you talk to them about their drawings, or they will soon be unwilling to talk about them at all. Ask them about the various figures - who or what they are - and comment on things that strike you as being interesting. Above all, show them you appreciate their work. This will keep the channels of communication open in the future, and will deepen the bond between you.