

SPATIAL PRESENTATION IN CHILDREN'S DRAWINGS:  
WHY DO JAPANESE CHILDREN DRAW IN THEIR OWN  
PARTICULAR WAYS?

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The central purpose of this study was to examine the kinds of socio-cultural factors that tend to produce a particular method of spatial treatment in children's drawings based on the universality of artistic development. In a pilot study of cross-cultural analysis of children's artistic development which was done from 1993 through 1995, spatial similarities and differences were examined in children's drawings based on the relationship between national origin (U.S. and Japanese), culture, and aesthetic in order to explore the concepts of universality and socio-cultural influences. In the initial comparison between Japanese and U.S. students of second, fourth, and sixth grades, there was a significant difference in spatial development for the two populations. There were some especially interesting characteristics in spatial treatment commonly found in Japanese students' drawings, such as "exaggerated view," "bird-eye's view," and "multi-perspective view," which were seldom found in U.S. children's drawings. Therefore, the purpose of this present research to confirm that these methods of spatial treatment were, in fact, unique or typical of Japanese children's drawings, in order to describe potentially unique patterns in graphic development among Japanese children, especially in elementary schools. If the patterns were really unique to Japanese children in elementary schools, I would attempt to identify the socio-cultural influences that were responsible for the early emergence of these characteristics. This study examined approximately 2,500 drawings by first through sixth grade students collected from three areas in Japan: Iwate (northern area), Tokyo (central area), and Naze (southern area) in summer, 1996. Drawings depicted "My friends and me playing in the school yard," a theme investigated in earlier studies by Elliot Eisner (1967) and Claire Golomb (1983). Drawings were classified according to 14 categories of spatial treatment proposed by Eisner (1967) and based on the relationship between the ground and figures, and overlappings. In addition to Eisner's categories, new categories were developed as needed to analyze spatial treatments unique to Japanese children's drawings. Chi-Square was used to analyze the development of spatial treatment in the drawings.