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## The study on determining environment and nature awareness of pre-school students and mentally disabled in Nigde province: Art therapy

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### Abstract

The study is about asking the children to draw who are students of pre-school and special education institutions. It is aimed to determine environment and nature awareness of the children with the guidance of school counseling services. It is only said that they can just draw on 'environment and nature'. The children are not informed about what they must draw. The study is applied on 551 preschool students (65 of them are disabled ones) and performed at Nasrettin Hoca Pre-School, Sayde and Mahmut Tek Pre-School, Minik Kalpler Kindergarten, Safir Kindergarten, Odtu Schools, Private Nigde Akkol Schools, Emine Teoman Special Education and Practice Center in Nigde and Mahmut Ozenc Special Education Center in Bor-Nigde. The study brings out the comparison results of the pictures drawn by mentally disabled students and preschool students.

**Keywords:** Children, nature awareness, art therapy.

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## 1. Introduction

All living beings interact with environment. They change each other, supply the needs and keep up the improving World with this interaction. Human being in evolution and changing supplies his/her needs by differentiating environment where he/she lives and brings many environment problems with him/her.

As a result of many environment disasters that we witness recently, the studies for protecting environment pollution are inadequate. It is also seen that environment cannot carry this pressure. However, climate changing which is the biggest environment disaster occurs according to global warming causes deterioration on natural resources and many serious problems are seen at environmental sustainability. Today, what we live is not just because of the drought situation but it also has high risks because of disruption on life balance as a result of excessive weather events are more often and more severe (Algedik, 2014). All efforts of scientists for environment problems are not sufficient. In addition, human is getting insensitive to nature so this causes increasing environment problems such as global warming. At this point, we need to find solutions that supply sustainability of environment and carry our natural sources for the next generation. We also need to produce eco-friendly solutions. Sustainability was first used with development concept. In 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development report, it was defined that natural sources were not consumed that day to keep next generations' needs as the role of balance between human and nature (Kaypak, 2011).

It is important to make awareness on individuals at early ages that they have rights to live healthy and safe environment and it is like a solution to make environmental awareness and sensitivity by education. Tilbury (1994) points that learning at early ages are ignored, these ages are critical times for children's environment education and early ages also are basic terms for building environmental attitudes. Because there is a parallel relationship between environment education and environment problems, it is important to determine their awareness level and point of view to environment problems (Yalcinkaya, 2012). The aim of education on environment today is that individuals recognise natural environment and learn to use natural sources fertile and truly. Today, we need to transfer environment education at early ages from preschool because environment problems and natural sources consumption are increasing. When we educate individuals more conscious, we can take serious steps for protecting environment (Demir & Yalcin, 2014).

Nature activities at preschool education are based on curiosity and investigation of children are helpful for them to understand the relationship between objects and events and it is also very important that they behave with environment consciousness at advancing ages. It is important taking children out to the nature, introducing them to living creatures and providing information for protecting the creatures. Preschool children who interact with nature directly feel themselves better, live in peace with others and themselves (Gulay, 2011).

'Environment' is a whole for preschool children where they live in. Child's room, house, family members, neighbours and siblings are his/her environment. So then, the child is a part of his/her environment and the child has the environment message that must be given to the child with preschool education. Tidying up own toys and room, helping others for tidying up at preschool, being awareness of climates, throwing trashes into the bin are behaviours for protecting environment at this stage (Kavruk, 2002). Art making (drawing) which is an enjoyable activity that preschool children love can be thought a mirror of mind. Drawing is an art that individuals can express, introduce themselves and perceive environment better than the other art branches.

In this study, those children draw their stories from their hearts and they were asked to draw what they understand when we say 'nature' to determine environment awareness at preschool children. So, it is supplied how preschool children perceive environment concept. It is also aimed to determine what level the preschool children are for environment activities in future.

## 2. Materials and methods

The children were asked to draw about environment and nature to determine the awareness of environment and nature from preschool students and special education students in Nigde province and Bor district. Art making is on control of preschool teachers, teachers of special education and counselling services. Before drawing, it is said to children to draw what they understand when they hear 'nature', there is no pressure on what to draw and on drawing process and no information is given to the children what to draw. The study is figured as qualitative to find out 'nature' perception and comment model is used in the study.

The study is applied on students in Nigde province at Nasrettin Hoca Pre-School, Sayde and Mahmut Tek Pre-School, Minik Kalpler Kindergarten, Safir Kindergarten, Odtu Schools, Private Nigde Akkol Schools, Emine Teoman Special Education and Practice Centre in Nigde and Mahmut Ozenc special Education Centre in Bor-Nigde. The study is performed with 231 girls and 255 boys, in total 486 children at 2–6 years old. Also, it is performed with 29 girls and 36 boys, in total 65 students from different ages who can draw at special education centres. The drawings of children at special education centres are analysed for their category.

When analysis is performed, the drawings of children are evaluated for developmental levels of art therapy:

It is possible to analyse the development of children drawings in five stages (Halmatov, 2015):

- Scribbling Stage (2–4 age)
- Beginning Schemas (4–7 age)
- Development of a visual schema (7–9 age)
- Realism (9–12 age)
- Adolescence (12+...)

Drawings in the study are evaluated according to these developmental stages, colours and figures are analysed for nature awareness. Art which gives clues about an individual's inner world is also related a person's point of view to life. Because of this, drawings are individual and unique, they are analysed one by one. Drawings are interpreted by an art analyst in accordance with clues.

## 3. Results and discussion

In this part, the drawings of students on 'nature' concept are evaluated according to developmental stages and analysed about colours, figures related to nature and landscape. It is analysed that 2 and 3 years old 76 children who are at scribbling stage draw for their development stage. Some symbols that students draw first time and ellipses, rounds and wavy lines which are seem independently are shown that they are aware of nature (Figure 1). On the contrary, we expect the drawings have colours and figures related to nature. The students use green, brown, yellow and blue mostly in their drawings. When we analyse the drawings and the notes about the drawing stories, they are happy and aware of nature. Although Kellogg (1969) and İlhan (1994) think that children at scribbling stage do not focus on colour conscious, it is thought that in this study children choose the colours of nature with awareness because of their city that they can know nature very well. So their usage of colour is truly an important result of this study.



**Figure 1. Scribbling stage draw**

It is seen that 4, 4.5, 5 and 6 years old children have beginning schema features and they draw appropriately for their developmental stage, they also can use landscape. All children draw trees, mountain, river, cloud, sun, bird, giraffe, turtle, rabbit, cat, dog, butterfly and insect on their papers properly; however, some of 4–4.5 years old children use different colours with the figures (Figure 2). The birds flying in the sky and butterflies on flowers match up with natural realism.



**Figure 2. Drawings about the schematic features**

Artut (2004) stated that perception, proportion, place concept and emotional features are significant elements on drawings of beginning schema stage children and these factors are parallel with children's general development. It is seen that 5 and 6 years old children use both colours and figures as the same in nature. These children draw themselves between sky and landscape so we understand that they tell us their relationship with nature by this feature. They draw themselves, own families, own friends happy in nature. In addition to all these details, they also draw a cultural figure: apple tree. Apple trees are common of the district and apple is produced there, many children go picnics at their gardens far from their houses, so they draw what they like to see (Figure 3). Also, Malchiodi (2005) stated that trees with green leaves or Brown body, four wheels of a car or four legs of a table can be drawn by 5–6 years old children and artistic talent is developing at this stage. As Ozonder Aydin (2017) stated that children at this stage can draw more clear because their hand skills are developed. According to Yavuzer (1992), it is emphasized that the drawings at this stage could determine the type of drawing.



**Figure 3. Different types of drawing and cultural figures**

When the drawings of 65 students at special education centres are analysed, how old the students (4–14 years old) are, the drawings are at scribbling, beginning schematic and schematic stage. Besides developmental stages, we see the colours used, they are appropriate with nature and figures are seen in the nature. They are also happy to be in nature. Got and Cheng (2008) state that people who have developmental disabilities express their feelings with art making help them to socialize and improve their social and cognitive features. So they show up their negative emotions in a more positive and creative way. Art making is not threatening because they do not use verbal communication (Tsai, 2015). Similarly, according to American Art Therapy Association (2017), it is stated that the use of art making help people improve physical and emotional well-being, resolve problems, develop interpersonal skills, increase self-esteem and relieve stress.

When all students draw nature with trees, rivers, flowers, mountains, birds in summer, only one special education student at eighth grade draw nature in winter with a snowman in charcoal. It is determined that it is winter when the students make drawings but no snow; we understand here the student love snow and miss snowing in her inner World (Figure 4). Akalin and Ustundag (2012) stated that drawings are important evaluation tool of expressing inner world for children. West (2012) also stated when presented the change to create art, a person with developmental disabilities is invited to awaken his/her creative spirit.





Figure 4. Drawings of student at special education Centres

#### 4. Conclusion

It is aimed to determine how preschool students and special education students perceive when it is said 'nature' by drawing accordance with identifying environment awareness. As a result of the study, it is made out that all preschool students are happy with nature and drawing about nature. In addition to this, because garden life is a part of daily routine of the district, apple trees are seen in all drawings as a cultural concept. Also, the students draw turtles and butterflies with smooth tones so we understand that they love animals and they do not want to hurt them.

Students at special education centres draw on scribbling and beginning schemas stages whether they are at the same age of the stage or not, we understand that developmental stages of art and mental development stages show a parallel line. It is found that all students including special education ones have ideas about nature, respect nature and animals, love where they live.

It is seen in the study that children reflect their inner world into the drawings and they draw important situations for themselves. Art making (drawing) is one of the most effective tools for children to express their emotions and thoughts. We can reach much important information by art analysis of children such as talents, likes, character features, family and friend relationships, problems that they face to face and development stage.

As a result of the study, building nature consciousness at preschool stage is important for the next education stages and it is thought that building environment consciousness is an effective role on protecting environment problems. Therefore, it is made out that much more nature activities should be done at preschool and special education centres to build up this consciousness. These kinds of activities will be beneficial for increasing nature awareness at early ages. In the next stage of this study, it is thought that nature and science activities will be a developmental stage of environment and nature awareness so preschool students will gain this awareness at early ages and next studies will help new dimensions on environment consciousness development.

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