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**THE AESTHETIC PERCEPTIONS AND PREFERENCES  
OF YOUNG CHILDREN FOR VISUAL ARTWORKS**

by

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B.A.(Ed.), W.A.C.A.E.

This thesis is presented for the degree of  
Bachelor of Education (Hons)  
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## USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

## ABSTRACT

Literature dealing with aesthetics and young children indicates the importance of developing in children a degree of aesthetic sensitivity and an ability to respond aesthetically to both natural and man made objects. However, directions for developing young children's aesthetic awareness appear to be hampered by the lack of systematic research evidence on the aesthetic response capabilities which five to eight year old children display. Thus, provision of information that would assist art educators and Early Childhood teachers in the preparation of successful classroom experiences remains a priority in this area.

The research study reported in this thesis investigated the aesthetic response capabilities of the kindergarten to year three child. Particular attention was given to the children's preferences for and perceptions of visual artworks. Responses made by the children to two painting reproductions were used as indications of what the children saw in the paintings and which aspects of the paintings they preferred. Data collection and analysis was structured around particular topics dealing with elements of a painting. These were drawn from Parsons, Johnston and Durham (1978) and included subject matter, feelings, colour, the artist's properties and judgement.

The results of this study confirmed that young children are capable of responding aesthetically to visual artworks and that these responses have certain characteristics. A strong preference for subject matter and colour, for example,

was evident in the children's responses. In this sense, the present study supports findings of other researchers such as Parsons, Johnston and Durham (1978), Rosentiel, Morison, Silverman and Gardner (1978), and Parsons (1987).

The ability to respond aesthetically has implications for developing early childhood programmes including those which encourage young children to respond verbally to works of art in addition to creating them. Evidence of the five year old child possessing aesthetic response abilities also implies that these programmes can begin at the kindergarten level and thus assist in laying the foundations for the further development of aesthetic sensitivity throughout the primary years.

**DECLARATION**

"I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education: and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text."

**Jacqueline Kik**

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**



## 1.0 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The importance of probing the responses of young children to a wide variety of stimuli is apparent to early childhood educators seeking a deeper understanding of the way children think and learn. This study focuses on children's aesthetic responses to visual artworks because of growing interest in the place of the expressive arts in young children's development and because much remains to be learned about the ways young children are influenced by, and respond to artistic media.

### 1.2 GENERAL STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Research to date into aesthetic development indicates that it is possible for young children to respond aesthetically to works of art (Parsons, Johnston & Durham, 1978; Taunton, 1982; Taunton and Colbert, 1984). Given that young children are capable of an aesthetic response, the problem investigated in this study was the capabilities of the aesthetic responses made by young children. In more narrow terms, the particular nature of young children's aesthetic perceptions and their preferences towards visual artworks was the primary concern of this study.

An analysis of the stated problem reveals several components. To begin with, previous studies illustrate that research into the aesthetic responses of young children is quite scant. Secondly, although research is limited, it has indicated that young children do possess certain responsive competencies toward visual artworks. Thus, besides verifying the presence of an aesthetic ability in young

children, the nature of this inquiry is to explore specifically what these responses entail.

### 1.3 BRIEF OUTLINE AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The problem of children's responses to visual artworks has its origins in the literature dealing with young children and "aesthetics". Evans (1987) provided a stimulus for investigating previous studies dealing with the aesthetic responses of young children. He discussed the formal study of aesthetics as well as the prevailing directions and strategies of aesthetic research. Although this discussion dealt with aesthetics as it applied to music, literature, the visual arts and other related art forms (such as dance and theatre arts), indications were given by the author that general research into aesthetics has been "weak and sporadic" (Evans, 1987, p. 97). This issue is of substantial importance considering that the overall concept of aesthetic education is receiving greater recognition in terms of its place in the wider school curriculum and the benefits it provides for the individual child. Furthermore, discussions with Early Childhood teachers and art educators also revealed that this was an issue worth considerable attention.

As a result Evans (1987) provided a stimulus for further investigation of research findings about the aesthetic responses of young children. Several studies have investigated the stages of aesthetic development through which children pass (Gardner, Winner & Kircher, 1975; Parsons, Johnston & Durham, 1978; Rosentiel, Morison, Silverman & Gardner, 1978). Others have concentrated on determining the preferences children have for visual artwork (Hutt, Forrest & Newton, 1976; Machotka, 1966; Salkind & Salkind, 1973; Taunton, 1980). In these studies it was established that children do possess an ability to make certain aesthetic

responses. In addition, support for Evans' (1987) findings regarding the lack of research was also found in these studies. The main concerns expressed in the literature dealt not only with the lack of research into the aesthetic responses of young children (Rosentiel et al., 1978; Taunton, 1984; Taunton & Colbert, 1984), but also the need for further studies (Parsons et al., 1978; Rosentiel et al., 1978), and the implications that such research would have on aesthetic education as a whole (Feeney & Moravcik, 1987; Sharp, 1976; Taunton, 1982, Taunton & Colbert, 1984; ).

Given these findings, there appears to be a need for further probing and assessment of the aesthetic capabilities of young children - particularly their perceptions of and preferences for visual artworks. Therefore, the major purpose of this study is to uncover trends in the aesthetic responses of young children, and to identify characteristics of those responses. In addition, the results of this research should deepen Early Childhood teachers' and art educators' understandings of the potential capabilities of young children, and suggest ways that these capabilities can be incorporated into the classroom to the child's advantage.

#### 1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Broadly, this research study is an exploration of the general trends in the aesthetic responses made by young children. From these results, indications of the children's capabilities may be provided for Early Childhood teachers and art educators alike.

From this type of study, generalizations are made about the case - however, according to Adelman, Jenkins and Kemmis (1976, p. 142), "in its most significant form, generalizations about the case promotes generalizations from case to case". Thus, findings about each case allow generalizations to be made to a similar population given the *same set of circumstances*.

Given an illustration of what young children are capable of discussing, a stimulus for educational 'action' may be provided. Further support for the growing awareness of the place and importance of aesthetic education may be an outcome of this research. With a knowledge of what children can respond to and prefer, curriculum developers (for example, within a single school or classroom situation) would be equipped with a framework for structuring whole school or classroom curricula in aesthetic education (specifically for the Early Childhood years). A basis for appropriate questioning at this level may also result from the effectiveness of the interview instrument.

## 1.5 DEFINITION OF TERMS

Because the field of aesthetics is diverse, it is necessary to define terms as used in the study. It should then be noted that the broad terms relating to aesthetics are given a more in-depth explanation in the literature review, but the meanings ascribed to the following words and phrases are those which most accurately suit this particular study.

Aesthetics in this study implies "talk about" an artwork - incorporating both perceptions and value judgements about the construction and appearance of the artwork.

**Aesthetic response** is a special kind of response that deals with feeling and "...includes those responses in which the qualities and meanings of objects and artistic intentions are the major focus" (Taunton, 1982, p. 94).

**A work of art** is a human production designed to reward aesthetic perceptions.

**Visual artwork** in this situation is used to denote a painting or image depicting some object, person or situation.

**Values** in this study are the criteria for determining level of goodness, worth or beauty.

**Aesthetic education** in its simplest form, implies learning how to perceive, judge and value aesthetically what we come to know through our senses (Lenton, Darby, Miller & Herman, 1986, p. 115).

**The young child or early childhood years** in the context of this study apply to those children between five and eight years of age.

**Nature** relates to the qualities or characteristics of the children's responses.

The remaining set of definitions are explanations of the terms used in the research instrument. They are derived from the descriptions of the topics put forward by Parsons et al., (1978).

**Semblance** refers to the outward appearance of an object. This term is meant to cover the range of possible views concerning how and whether a painting refers, or what makes a picture.

**Subject matter** means what is referred to or pictured. This topic includes all views on the kind of subject matter which is appropriate or acceptable in a painting.

**Feelings** is concerned with the kinds and sources of emotion which are influential in the aesthetic response.

**Colour** deals with the notion of what it is about colour that is pleasing, or what constitutes goodness of colour in a painting.

**Artists properties** deals with children's views of what is necessary to be a good artist - that is, what an artist would need to paint a good painting, and in particular, what would be difficult about producing a good painting. 'Property' refers to an attribute, quality or characteristic.

**Judgement** includes all kinds of reasons offered for an aesthetic judgement, in other words, a ything that is counted as a reason for claiming "this is a good painting."

## 1.6 OVERVIEW OF THESIS

Chapter One has established the content and direction of the study with a statement of the problem investigated and a description of the problem's

background and significance. Clarification of the terms employed in the study have also been provided through a list of definitions.

In Chapter Two a review of current literature dealing with aesthetics and its applications to young children's responses is given. The review looks at the various components of aesthetics as well as current aesthetic response research and methodological considerations related to the research studies.

Chapter Three provides an explanation of the conceptual framework developed for this study, as well as the more specific research questions which provide a direct focus for the research. The limitations of the study are also discussed.

Chapter Four deals with the methods employed for data collection and analysis. Chapters Five and Six then outline and discuss the results gathered as part of the study, with examples given of the children's responses. Discussion of the implications of the study for art educators and teachers also occurs within these chapters.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND RESEARCH**



## 2.0 REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND RESEARCH

### 2.1 OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER

In order to develop further a coherent and precise conceptual framework for this research, it is necessary to consider the related literature. Initially, two library searches from the ERIC database were conducted using 'aesthetic perceptions', 'children', 'art', 'preference', 'judgement', and 'Early Childhood' as the key descriptors. The period set for the search was between January 1966 and December 1988. Fifty-seven items were identified, including journal articles, position, reference and conference papers. Of the fifty-seven items, only twelve proved relevant to the topic, with a large percentage of the material being unobtainable due to its geographical source. The remaining literature was then obtained from sources referred to in the journal articles, and textbooks related to aesthetics.

Much of the information gathered for this literature review involved research conducted either in the United States or the United Kingdom. Very little material was available on research conducted in Australia. However, significant textbook material in the area of aesthetics was also revised - including the work of Arnheim (1969), Lowenfeld and Brittain (1975), Ross (1982) and Chapman (1978). Current statements on art/craft curriculum development and policy documents were further sources of information.

Although not all the literature was directly related to this study, studies and writings of such authors as Castrup, Ain and Scott (1972), Ecker (1973), Flannery (1977), Gardner and Gardner (1973), Holt (1983), Keel (1972), Lankford (1986),

(1970), Gardner and Gardner (1973), and Flannery (1977), were reviewed because their work has contributed pertinent insights into the overall field of aesthetics and children, as well as the place of aesthetics in art education.

Thus, the review which follows includes an exposition of aesthetics in general, its development, and the issues for consideration when interpreting the research data in this area. Attention is then given to aesthetic response in particular, because of its direct relevance to the present study. The methodological considerations related to research in this area are also discussed, and finally the intentions of the present study are stated.

## 2.2 AESTHETICS IN GENERAL

Definitions put forward by several of the authors regarding the multifarious components of aesthetics provide important insights for subsequent analysis of aesthetic response. Furthermore, the area of aesthetic development in young children (that is, the stages through which children pass), and issues related to development such as exposure, linguistic capabilities, and cognition are fundamental to a deep understanding of the aesthetic responses that young children make.

### 2.2.1 Definitions

As indicated, a great deal of the literature sets out to clarify what is meant by 'aesthetics' as it applies to the young child, whether it be in terms of aesthetic attitudes, experiences, development, education, preferences or response. Conflicting statements arise due to the way in which these terms are interpreted

and applied in the context of studies and discussions. However, this 'conflict' appears to be more a result of how broadly or specifically the terms are defined. For example, Lankford (1986, p. 49) stated that 'aesthetics' is basically "asking questions and searching for answers about the nature of art", whereas Mead (in Lenten, Darby, Miller & Herman, 1986, p. 78) asserted that aesthetics is "the systematic attempt to formulate intellectually valid viewpoints regarding the basic issues in art and all areas of man's experience called beautiful and expressive." While Lankford's definition was quite broad, Mead set out to include not only works of art but also the beautiful and expressive areas of experience. Feeney and Moravcik (1987, p. 7), however, put forward a more narrow definition which regarded aesthetics as the "ability to critically evaluate works of art according to criteria that are defined by the culture." Generally, the accepted definition of aesthetics put forward by most authors involves the capacity to perceive, respond and be sensitive to the natural environment and to human creations.

Besides attempting to explain the broad term 'aesthetics', much of the literature also seeks to define its related aspects. For example, several suggestions have been put forward regarding what 'aesthetic development' implies. According to Rosario and Collazo (1981), a psychological approach to aesthetics investigates how the acquisition of aesthetic competence develops over time and with increasing age. Evans (1987) further stated that scholars generally agree that aesthetic development is distinguished from other forms of development by its search for beauty, particularly within the context of art and artistic experience.

Two interrelated definitions (in that the 'action' of one is the 'stimulus' for the other) are also frequently used in the reviewed literature, namely 'aesthetic scanning' (the procedure) and 'aesthetic response' (the outcome). Hewett and

Rush (1987) defined aesthetic scanning as the motion of looking closely at an artwork and describing what is seen. According to Taunton (1982, p. 94), 'aesthetic response' has been afforded a "wide interpretation" and includes those responses in which the "qualities and meanings of objects and artistic intentions are the major focus." Sharp (1976) extended this definition by explaining that an aesthetic response is a special kind of response which deals with "feeling" and talk about feeling.

Encompassed in the notion of an aesthetic response are both 'aesthetic preference' and 'aesthetic judgement'. Defining these dimensions has come about as a result of studies dealing with children's responses to visual artworks. Feeney and Moravcik (1987) summed up these two definitions by claiming that aesthetic preference deals with what children like and respond to personally in art works, whereas aesthetic judgement refers to the extent to which children's responses compare with adult standards of evaluation.

Three final interrelated definitions which appear in the literature include 'aesthetic perception', 'aesthetic attitude', and 'aesthetic experience'. Whereas Stokrocki (1984, p. 13) is more concerned with identifying 'aesthetic perception' as a *process* of "experiencing, identifying, discriminating and transferring sensory data", Evans (1987, p. 75) describes perception in aesthetics as an "intrinsic" procedure in which a person attends to the qualities of a perceived object or event "without accompanying utilitarian or ego concerns." By the latter definition aesthetic perception is thus closely linked to Reid's (1982, p. 4) definition of an 'aesthetic attitude' - where an object "is attended to and in some sense 'enjoyed' for itself". Furthermore, the link between 'aesthetic experience' and 'aesthetic attitude' is then made by Madeja (in Lenton et al., 1986, p. 114) who described it

as an experience that can be "valued for itself, an experience requiring no practical or functional justification for its existence". Montgomery (in Haskell, 1979, p. 5) also linked the aesthetic experience back to sensory perception. He concluded that it is more than just the functioning of the individual's sensory register - it also includes such "intrinsic" or "emotional responses as enjoyment, wonder, and the dedication of all levels of one's consciousness to an action".

The definitions cited above highlight the various dimensions to be considered within aesthetics and their applications to young children's responses. Each definition deals with aspects of the responses made by young children as they view and talk about visual artworks.

### **2.2.2 Aesthetic Development**

A number of studies have been conducted to determine the stages of aesthetic development through which children pass. Tauton (1982) gives a succinct overview of several of these studies. For example, a study conducted by Gardner, Winner and Kircher (1975) looked at the conceptions of children aged four to sixteen to the various arts, including music, visual arts and literature. A second study by Rosentiel, Morison, Silverman and Gardner (1978) dealt with critical judgements about paintings amongst children in grades one to ten. In a third study conducted by Gardner (1974), which investigated metaphoric understandings of seven to nineteen year olds, a substantiated description of young children's development in the arts was provided. This description proposed that young children at five years of age are "audience members" of the arts because they experience feelings while contemplating objects and because they can distinguish boundaries between reality and illusion.

Finally, an interview-style study by Parsons, Johnston & Durham (1978) using children from grades one through twelve, revealed that aesthetic experience develops from a highly egocentric response into a response showing sensitivity to aesthetic qualities intrinsic in the object.

*Developmental stages in children's aesthetic responses were structured to reflect the changing sense of relevance about what is specifically aesthetic in the experience of an object and the increasing ability to experience an object with greater complexity, subtlety and responsiveness (Taunton, 1982, p. 101-102).*

Related to this notion of aesthetic development is the perceived ability of *young children* to respond aesthetically. A majority of authors indicate that young children enjoy looking at and talking about art, but confusion arises with respect to capabilities. For example, reports by Taunton and Colbert (1984) and Bowker and Sawyers (1988) assert that young children can state preferences for particular artworks and support their preferences with simple personal judgemental criteria. Although Baskin and Harris (1982, p. 11) see some aspects of art appreciation as clearly beyond the capability of young children, other aspects - colour, line, shape or composition - are elements to which "they can respond in an intellectually honest and productive manner". Furthermore, Feldman (1970) and Chapman (1978), in their support of aesthetic education, also accept the existence of the preschool child's capacity for aesthetic response. These findings endorse the need for further research into aesthetic response because of the implications that arise for art educators and curriculum developers.

### **2.2.3 Issues Within the Literature**

In terms of aesthetics 'in general', issues which affect children's aesthetic responses have been identified by various writers (for example, Castrup, Ain &

Scott, 1972); Rosentiel et al., 1978; Taunton & Colbert, 1984; . These issues are often stated as the *reason* for conducting a particular case study, or they are given as a *result* of an investigation, namely, in terms of the possible influences they had on the overall outcomes. The effects of the child's language capabilities, their experience with or exposure to artworks, and the relationship between aesthetic response and cognition, are often cited as the main issues concerning children's perceptions and preferences. These three issues are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they interrelate and provide subtle and complex influences on a child's response to artworks.

#### **Language Ability**

The ability of young children to state art preferences and often support these preferences is apparent (Taunton & Colbert, 1984). However, according to Rosentiel et al., (1978) and Taunton and Colbert (1984), children may be handicapped by a limited vocabulary for discussing aesthetic topics although no specification is given by these writers. Stokrocki (1984) has suggested that due to the lack of appropriate vocabulary, children develop metaphorical descriptions for things that they see - that is, they describe a new meaning by substituting a word or phrase. For example, Stokrocki (1984, p. 16) quotes a child describing a shiny, foil covered box as something that "looks like Star Wars".

#### **Exposure and Experience**

Apart from language as a factor affecting aesthetic response, the influence of exposure to, or experience with artworks is referred to frequently in the

literature. Castrup, Ain & Scott (1972) state that over the past several years, art educators have begun to accept the view that the art abilities of children are not only the consequences of maturation, but are greatly influenced by the skills acquired through learning experiences. Both explicit learning, where discussion is direct, and implicit learning, whereby children develop a shared meaning system with their significant others, would play a part. This perspective "is one represented by socialization approaches looking into how aesthetic competence is socially shaped" (Rosario & Collazo, 1981, p. 72). According to the view of Bourdieu (in Rosario & Collazo, 1981) aesthetic perception is not natural or spontaneous. It is, instead, acquired through informal and formal educational processes. Therefore, although aesthetic response is often equated with the child's development, it can also be viewed in terms of classroom experiences and discussions, or educational exposure to artworks. Thus, the roles of parents and classroom teachers bear much weight in this situation. For example, Taunton & Colbert (1984) cited the classroom studies of Sharp (1981) and of Douglas & Schwartz (1967), who concluded that increased teacher talk of aesthetic qualities ultimately increased the students' talk along a similar vein.

### **Cognition**

The relationship between cognition and aesthetic response is clearly a dominant theme in the literature. According to Parsons (1976), aesthetic conception is based on cognitive development; the young child learns to distinguish a particular object or quality represented in an artwork from his or her own favourite and generalized conceptions. Limitations in the



aesthetic responses made by young children are often attributed to their level of cognitive operations (Taunton & Colbert, 1984). However, the aesthetic response also has an affective and experiential dimension. It requires the person to respond with some feeling (Parsons et al., 1978). Because of this, issues have arisen as to whether the aesthetic responses of children are primarily cognitive or affective in nature. Hutt, Forrest and Newton (1976) suggest that although visual attention to an object appears primarily cognitive in its dimensions, preference for particular artworks reflect affective dimensions.

In relation to the above points, it is vital to note that the whole aspect of aesthetic response is undoubtedly bound up in the interrelated issues of language, cognition, experience and exposure. Although these variables are not the primary focus of this study, consideration will be given to them in interpreting results.

## **2.3 AESTHETIC RESPONSE RESEARCH**

Empirical research into aesthetic response dates back at least fifty years, but only recently have researchers paid more attention to the responses of young children. Hence, another major theme constant in the literature is that of the need for research into aesthetics as it applies to young children.

### **2.3.1 Lack of Research and the Need for Further Study**

The apparent lack of research into aesthetic response was first documented by Rosentiel et al., (1978). Although it was acknowledged that considerable attention

has been paid to how works of art can and should be judged, little research has gone into how children become capable of making appropriate discriminations among criteria within the artwork.

Taunton emphasized this concern in a number of her studies which were specifically aimed at young children. For example, she indicated that whilst children's participation in the arts was "wide ranging and inclusive of a responsive dimension", little interest in responsive behaviour was evident in the "studio-oriented pedagogical literature concerned with pre-schoolers" (Taunton, 1982, p. 93). Taunton concluded that the research undertaken was focused more on the limitations of children's responses rather than on the potentialities, a characteristic not uncommon in research on young children's development to date (Donaldson, Greive and Pratt, 1983). In further studies involving four to six year olds, Taunton began each of her findings with a brief statement of the lack of attention given to the expressive nature of young children's responses (Taunton, 1984; Taunton & Colbert, 1984). From a curriculum perspective, Sharp (1976) also reiterated this point by claiming that in the literature of Early Childhood Education there are relatively few goals or activities framed around aesthetic response.

Evans (1987) suggested that a reason for the small amount of research was partly due to the difficulty of gaining access to child participants below the kindergarten/primary grade level. Feeney and Moravcik (1987) also put forward the proposition that some art specialists believe that young children are not able to make judgements and therefore are not capable of aesthetic responses of any kind. Beliefs of this kind could be a further reason why little research has been initiated.

Rosentiel et al., (1978) concluded from their studies that although affective and personal preference dominate in the artistic judgements of young children, they tended to confuse criteria and have difficulty verbalizing impressions of works of art. Taunton (1983) and several other authors (Lark-Horovitz, Lewis & Luca, 1973; Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1975; Smith, 1973) also concluded that the ability to judge effectively does not occur until adolescence. Perhaps because of these, and similar findings, researchers appear reluctant to deal with aesthetic development until children are in upper primary grades and high school. However, although effectiveness as a judge does not seem to appear until adolescence, according to Feeney & Moravcik (1987) the foundations for stimulating aesthetic sensitivity in children can be laid at an early age.

Despite the lack of research, the need for further studies is also emphasized by various writers. Rosentiel et al., (1978) and Evans (1987), drawing on nationwide assessments, indicated that there was a generally low degree of aesthetic sensitivity amongst school aged children. Therefore, research is required that will assist curriculum developers and classroom teachers to clarify educational frameworks related to aesthetics.

Alongside these concerns about aesthetic development and response has been a growing recognition of the lack of art appreciation in practice (Moore, 1973). As a result, attention has increasingly been turned to aesthetic education. However, before art educators can assess the improvement of aesthetic responses, they need to know *how* children actually respond to works of art prior to receiving instruction. Taunton (1982, p. 93) goes further in saying that regardless of the discrepancies and the neglected areas in the literature, "a view of young children

having definite, albeit emergent, responsive capabilities in the arts is surfacing and needs acknowledgement".

### 2.3.2 Current Findings

Drawing on developmental frameworks, a number of researchers have been able to identify general characteristics of young children's "talk about" and "conceptions of" the arts. Taunton (1982) and Taunton & Colbert (1984), claim that the aesthetic responses of young children have usually been analysed by the children's performances on preference, matching and sorting tasks. Preference research by Coffey (1969), Lark-Horovitz (1937), Rosentiel et al., (1978), Rump & Southgate (1980), Taunton (1980) and Machotka (1962), found that children between four and six years of age prefer representational and brightly coloured painting reproductions of familiar and pleasant subject matter. In addition, Taunton (1980) acknowledged the work of Cranston (1952) and Katz (1944) who reported that content was the primary source of appeal for younger subjects.

Although subject matter has been identified as highly relevant in determining preferences, according to Bowker and Sawyers (1988), little agreement has been reported for the subjects that children like best. However, Parsons et al., (1978) found that subject matter which was 'happy', 'pretty' and 'nice' was preferred rather than pictures which were 'sad' or 'ugly'. Furthermore, even though representational paintings were chosen in the majority of studies, Gardner, Winner & Kircher (1975), and Hardiman & Zernich (1981) reported that four and five year olds preferred abstract artworks.

In terms of preference for realism, Machotka (1966) found that this began to occur around the age of eight and increased from then onwards. However, Coffey (1969) also found a preference for realistic non-objective paintings existed at the kindergarten level. Bowker and Sawyers went on to say that conflicting findings may be due in part to the methodological problems of preference studies. Nevertheless, further consideration of children's preferences is clearly needed if a sound base of knowledge is to be provided for teachers engaged in advancing children's aesthetic sensitivity.

Research by Parsons (1976), Stokrocki (1984) and Parsons et al., (1978), has resulted in additional characteristics of children's aesthetic responses being uncovered. For example, they have reported that young children's verbal responses to art works have frequent references to personal favourites and associations. The studies by Parsons et al., (1978) and Rosentiel et al., (1978) likewise suggest that young children may assume that others respond to art as they do and they may fail to distinguish between requests for personal, preferential responses and requests for evaluative responses.

Coffey (1969) and Taunton (1978) further noted that preschoolers sometimes comment about the expressive qualities or the affective content of reproductions. However, Parsons et al., (1978) found that young children attribute feelings more to characters within the work rather than in relation to themselves. In terms of the artist's properties, Parsons also concluded that younger children tend to answer the question of "what makes him/her a 'good' artist" more in terms of the physical items necessary to paint a 'good' painting - for example, brushes, water and paint to colour it.

Finally, several broad findings encountered in the literature dealing with children's perceptions of visual artworks have been summed up in the work of Hardiman & Zernich (1981). These include an apparent mechanistic phase that four to seven year olds go through as they concentrate on the concrete aspect of art. For example, the belief that paintings come from factories or that paintings 'just begin' has been reported by these authors. Nevertheless, most young children agree that anyone can make a work of art. They often insist that models are necessary for painting, although they recognise that an artist can paint things that aren't seen. Hardiman and Zernich (1981) also concluded that young children had little sense of artistic style and the medium of the work was usually of secondary importance.

It is important to note at this point that problems associated with research findings which illustrate what children respond to in an art object are twofold - methodological and theoretical. Taunton (1982) explained that methodological concerns have to do primarily with the manner of stimuli selection, the reliability of content analysis procedures for children's responses, and the operational definitions of terms such as 'style' and 'realism'. Theoretical problems involve the lack of a theoretical base for much of the research, resulting in an accumulation of bits of information about young children and the arts but in few well-ordered insights. According to Taunton (1982, p. 97), "both the methodological and theoretical difficulties often cause the research findings to be inextricably tied to the exact stimuli used in a study, thus limiting the applicability of the conclusions".

### 2.3.3 Implications from the Research to Date

Despite the limited research on aesthetic responses of young children, and the limitations within research studies, implications for teachers, parents and for art curricula have been drawn. Art educators who advocate paying attention to the development of responsive capabilities in young children express support for aesthetic education (particularly by focusing on the role of the adult) and tacitly accept the existence of the capacity for aesthetic response in the preschool child.

Feldman (1970, p. 187) states:

*A kindergarten child will perform all these operations [the same critical operations performed by professionals - description, analysis, interpretation and judgement] spontaneously but in random order. Teaching is largely a job of systemizing his most irrepressible desire to talk about art.*

The crucial role of adults in the responsive development of young children has also been emphasized by Chapman (1978, p. 154):

*The manner in which a young child encounters a work of art is just as important as the quality of the work itself; in every case, adults play a vital role in determining what children notice about a particular work and how children feel about the very process of encountering works of art.*

Following her studies of the responsive abilities of four year olds, Taunton (1984) stressed to educators and parents alike that art education for young children could reasonably include responding to art as well as making it. Several authors indicate that educators should provide opportunities for children to discuss with others what they see when they look at art works, to state their preferences and evaluations, and to explore verbally the basis for their own views and the views of

others (Feeney & Moravcik, 1987; Sharp, 1976; Taunton, 1982; Taunton & Colbert, 1984).

Further support for developing the aesthetic abilities of young children through education is viewed in the light of the benefits it will provide for the individual child. Madeja (in Lenten et al., 1986, p. 115) stated that learning to recognize and appreciate the aesthetic allows us to enjoy the full measure of our humanity by developing the capacities of both our mind and senses. More specifically, Montgomery (in Haskell, 1979, p. 6) concluded that "aesthetic education in schools will produce students who can perceive, analyze, judge and value the things they see, hear and touch in their environment".

Thus, in reviewing this section dealing with aesthetic response research, the *rationale* for conducting this study has been given. The inadequate amount of research, as well as the need for further study, and the resulting educational implications, provided the focus for this section of the review.

#### **2.4 METHODS EMPLOYED BY THE RESEARCHERS**

The methods used by the researchers to conduct their studies and to gain apposite information about the aesthetic abilities of children are described below. Procedures were extracted from research outlines and strategies for encouraging and gauging the aesthetic preferences and perceptions of young children have been collated. These procedures and strategies have been considered for their contribution to the methodology that was used in the present research study.



#### 2.4.1 Procedures and Strategies

The most salient procedure used to tap aesthetic response in the research to date has been the interview (for example, Moore, 1973; Gardner, Winner & Kircher, 1975; Parsons, Johnston & Durham, 1978; Rump & Southgate, 1967). However, in preference (Hutt, Forrest & Newton, 1976; Machotka, 1966; Salkind & Salkind, 1973; Taunton, 1980) and sorting or matching tasks (Gardner, 1974; Taunton, 1984), visual stimuli such as polygons, painting reproductions or photographs have also been used. A large proportion of these studies are developmental with an emphasis upon age-related trends in aesthetic response.

Preference and sorting or matching tasks involved very little interaction with the researcher, apart from the researcher getting the subject to justify a preference or explain the reason for sorting in a particular way. These tests are often used to measure a child's aesthetic 'sensitivity', with aesthetic scores being awarded on the basis of how closely the individual agrees with art judgements delivered by a group of recognized art authorities.

The structured interview situation elicits more 'individual' verbal responses from the child. For example, Parsons, Johnston & Durham (1978) interviewed children in grades one through to twelve concerning painting reproductions and analyzed the children's comments under the topics of semblance, subject matter, feeling, colour, the artist's properties and judgement. For each of these topics, developmental stages, based on advances in the ability to take the perspective of others, were proposed. This method resulted in identifying the various characteristics of aesthetic response related to each age grouping.

Another procedure used in aesthetic research is the controlled experimental or laboratory study which typically includes presenting individuals with one or two types of stimuli and then monitoring some variety of consequent verbal or non-verbal response. Attempts are normally made to isolate or otherwise manipulate variables represented in the material that may influence aesthetic satisfaction, preference or judgement (Evans, 1987). For the purposes of this study, this material was not deemed applicable to be included in the literature review because of the different methodological approaches used by these researchers in comparison to the naturalistic line of enquiry seen as more appropriate for studies involving young children.

To date, a variety of strategies for approaching the topic of art with young children have been documented. Feeney & Moravcik (1987) and Taunton and Colbert (1984) give suggestions for talking to children about art. Feeney and Moravcik, for example, provide a sample of questions that could be asked in reference to an artwork. Hewett & Rush (1987) also give examples of questions to support aesthetic scanning. These questions may be used to initiate and continue discussion when talking about a topic or artwork. Likewise, Taunton (1983), discusses types of questions to encourage critical responses amongst children. For example, cognitive memory questions that require the child to reproduce facts, formulae, definitions or other remembered content are suggested. The rationale given for using a questioning technique is that it can extend, enhance and encourage the responding process.

After an analysis of the procedures and strategies given in the literature cited above, the structured interview method, involving direct questioning about an artwork, appeared to evoke the most productive responses from young children.

This method has also highlighted changes in cognitive functioning across the age levels of the subjects interviewed in a number of studies. Because of positive reactions to study design and implementation and because of results gained using the structured interview method, this approach was deemed most appropriate for the present study.

## 2.5 INTENTIONS OF 'THE PRESENT STUDY

After consideration of the results of previous studies, the present research project was aimed at assessing further the capabilities of young children as they respond to a series of visual artworks. Particular emphasis was placed on the children's perceptions and preferences of these artworks. Using the topics defined in the study by Parsons et al., (1978), questions were asked of the children and their responses analysed into clusters to determine the nature of their response and the reasons given for their replies. As with much of the documented literature, some implications for the overall field of Early Childhood Education have been addressed although it is recognised that these are qualified by the sample size and composition.

## 2.6 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

The information presented in this literature review has determined current research trends and findings, and provided a foundation for the present study. Various facets of 'aesthetics' have been clarified so that a framework for discussion about the aesthetic perceptions and preferences of young children could be established. To date, little aesthetic research has been conducted at the Early Childhood level. Furthermore there appears to be a pressing need to

explore the multiple aspects concerning recognized responsive abilities in young children. Valid findings that have been obtained are mainly the result of the probing interview technique adopted by a selection of reputable aesthetic researchers.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGICAL AND CONCEPTUAL CONSIDERATIONS**

### 3.0 METHODOLOGICAL AND CONCEPTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

#### 3.1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to define the *boundaries* of a problem, researchers must have a clear understanding of the various attributes of the problem - whether they be conceptual, action oriented or value based (Guba, 1977). The problem investigated in this study is the *capabilities of young children as they respond aesthetically to works of art*. The nature of the problem was manifested in the perceptions of and the preferences young children had for visual artworks. Although the problem stated appeared to be a combination of all three orientations, its basic characteristics were *conceptual*. In particular, it is a problem which aims to work out the details or characteristics of children's aesthetic responses.

The central task was to establish the distinctive features of the aesthetic perceptions and preferences of young children. While results of an inquiry of this kind may suggest a particular course of *action* in the development of children's aesthetic responses, the primary concern is not related to developing alternative teaching strategies. Although the study seeks to determine the aesthetic capabilities of young children, it is not aimed at an *evaluation* or assessment of the worth of talking to children about artworks. Rather, it is dealing with the overall *concept* of aesthetic response, and from the data collected, a series of characteristics relating to aesthetic perceptions and preferences of young children will be determined.

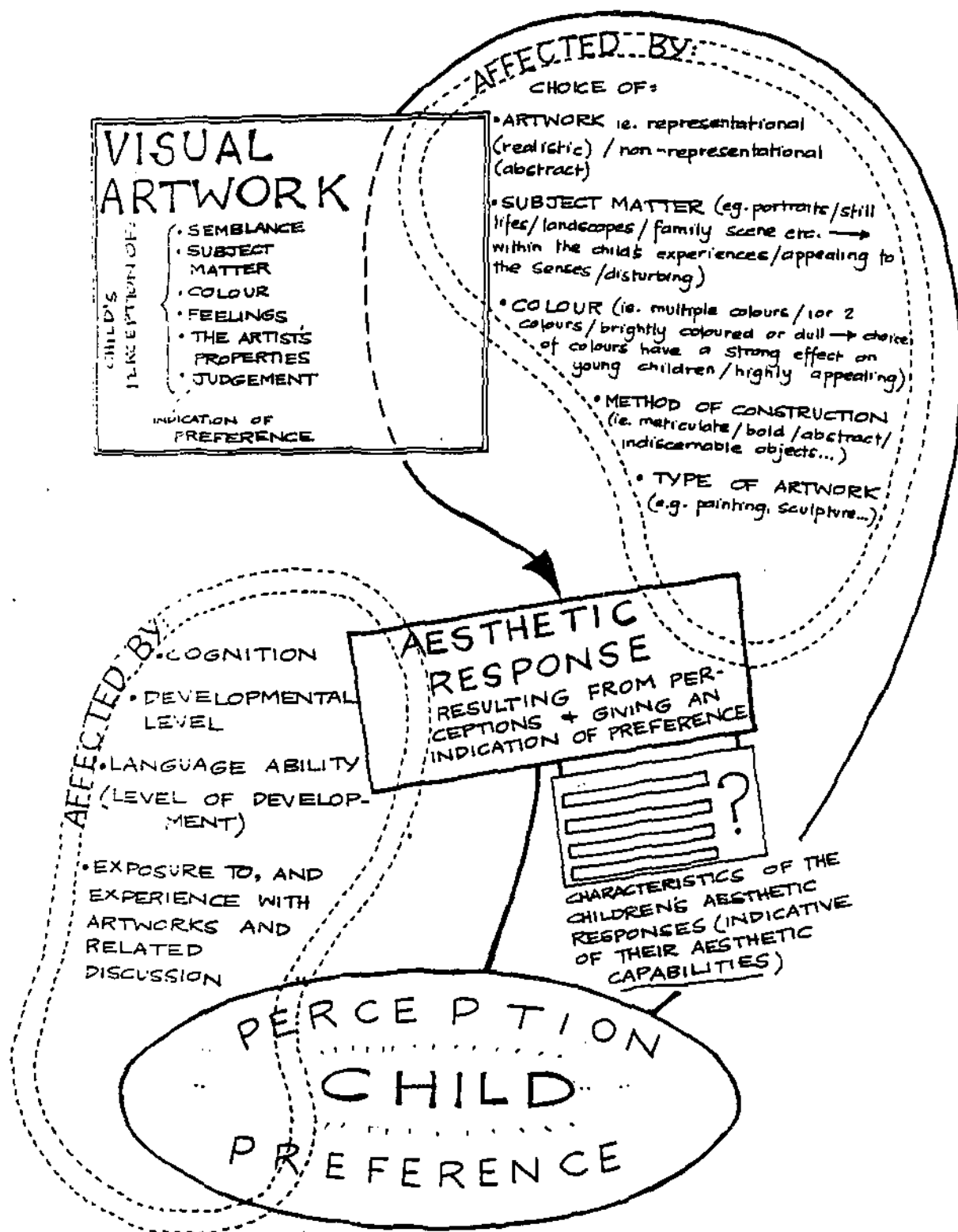
In broad terms, this study is a naturalistic investigation. Due to the nature of this type of inquiry it is necessary for a *conceptual framework* to be presented so that the ensuing research questions may demonstrate the deductive logic of the overall study. The interactive components of the framework are presented in Figure 1 below in diagrammatic form to clarify the various relationships.

In reference to the preceding diagram, the child is the central component of the framework and is directly linked to the artwork, which in itself acts as the stimulus for response. The outcome, or *aesthetic response*, is a result of an interaction between the child's perceptions of, and preferences for, a set of visual artworks.

Within this framework however, there are a variety of issues which encroach upon either the child or the artwork, and thus influence the nature of the child's response. Recognition of such issues is necessary, but the purpose of identifying these is mainly to define the boundaries of the study. Several of these aspects are treated in the section on the delimitations of the inquiry.

This framework represents the child as being a singular, 'bounded' case. Not only is the child bounded by his/her geographic and cultural positions, but also by the nature of the study. The child has certain perceptions and preferences which in this study will be directed toward visual artworks. At this stage it must also be noted that although 'perceptions' and 'preferences' are indicated as separate elements, they are in fact interrelated. That is to say, a child's preferences are actually based on the way he/she *perceives* the artwork to be. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this study, these two aspects are assessed separately.

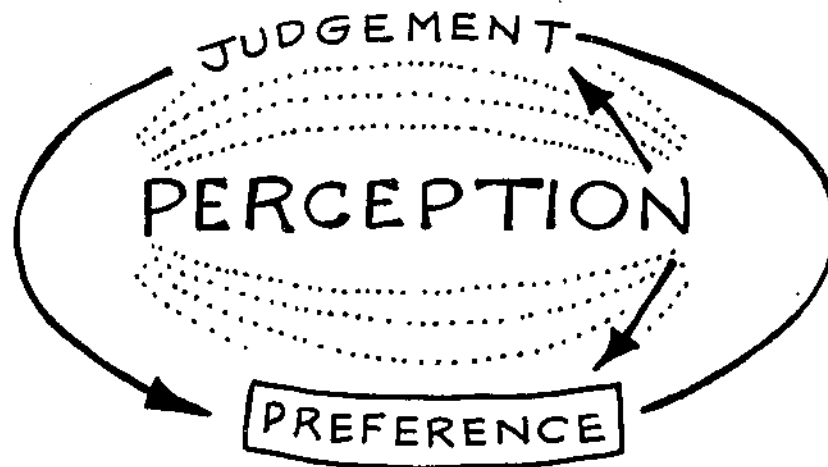
Fig. 1. Conceptual framework





As the child views the various reproductions, he/she is required to give some verbal response based on a selection of 'topics' - namely, semblance, subject matter, colour, feeling, the artist's properties, and an overall judgement of the particular work. The aesthetic responses given by the child are an indication of how the artwork is *perceived* to be, as well as a determination of the *preferences* for a particular reproduction or aspects within that work. The topic of 'judgement' is the stimulus that activates the child's preferences. Thus, within the concept of *perception* is the notion of *preference* which itself is primarily determined by the child's *judgement*. This 'interrelatedness' is clarified in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2



As the aesthetic responses are given, so too are the characteristics of the child's perceptions and preferences highlighted, therefore indicating the general capabilities of each child's response. This framework acknowledges that the child's visual and verbal interactions with the selected artworks will produce a set

of aesthetic responses - however, the precise nature of these perceptions and preferences is to be established.

Even though the responses may be influenced by elements impinging on either the child or the artwork, these elements are not considered as independent variables in this study. However, a recognition of the child's level of cognitive development, his/her stages of language acquisition, and exposure to, or experience with visual artworks and related discussions, will have a bearing upon the potential outcomes. In addition, the choice of artworks (whether they be representational or non-representational), as well as the choice of colour and subject matter, and the manner of construction may influence the subject's aesthetic responses. This last set of variables, however, can be controlled to a degree by choosing artworks which are representative of a variety of techniques and subject matter.

Set out below are the **research questions** which further refine the problem into selected parts. Before stating these questions, an explanation of the issues which are to be studied is given.

- Firstly, the *qualities/aspects or elements* that children perceive to be contained within an artwork require assessment. The tacit assumption that the aspects to which the children are able to provide 'answers' give some indication of their general aesthetic perceptions has been made in this case.
  
- Secondly, this study seeks to define *how* the children respond to the artworks, and to what *extent* the children are able to discuss questions

relating to the topics of semblance, subject matter, colour, feeling, the artist's properties, and judgement.

- Thirdly, the *preferences* which result from the children's perceptions will be examined through the responses made by them. In particular, which paintings they consider to be 'good' or 'bad', and which they like or dislike will be taken as an indicator of preference.
  
- Finally, the *reasons* given by the children for their choice of 'liking or disliking' will be sought. The elements to which the children refer as an explanation for their choices may be linked to the topics of discussion themselves, e.g. the topic of 'colour'.

The establishment of certain behaviours characteristic of the children's responses will be determined through the following questions.

### 3.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. To what extent can young children perceive or respond to semblance, subject matter, colour, feeling, and the artist's properties in making judgements of two given reproductions of artwork?
  
2. What is the nature of young children's perceptions/response regarding semblance, subject matter, colour, feeling, the artist's properties and judgement within two given reproductions of artwork?

3. Upon which attributes of two given reproductions of artwork do young children place value?
4. To what extent can young children offer reasons for their preferences in this regard?

These four questions thus reflect the focus of the overall study and are indicative of the information which the study seeks. Due to the methods used in conducting this inquiry, responses to the questions may be applied to more than one focus. Careful analysis of the findings will therefore be required to separate the various aspects of the problem that these questions address. In addition, as the study progresses, it is possible that further questions may arise - these may be answered within the study, or provided as suggestions for further research at the end of this inquiry.

### 3.3 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As indicated in the literature review, many of the studies previously conducted have been developmental in nature (for example, Parsons et al., 1978; Rosentiel, Morison, Gardner & Silverman, 1978). Although this study is looking at subjects from five to eight years of age - it is not intended to be a developmental inquiry. Rather than looking at the changes in preferences and perceptions over the five to eight age range, each subject in this study is treated as a singular, 'bounded case'. In this situation the aesthetic perceptions and response/preferences of each child are studied and *comparisons* made between the responses of children of different ages.

Findings of this study involve the area of cognitive development. However, the influence of the subjects' stage of cognitive functioning will not be considered as an isolated phenomena. Language development, an embedded issue in terms of the influences it places on children's responses, will likewise be studied on a comparative basis, and not in terms of the stages of development (i.e. as language shifts from subjective, egocentric responses to those which are more objective).

In addition, the aspect of previous experience with, or exposure to artworks and art-related discussions is recognized due to the effect that such variables may have on the study. As with the other points listed above, these elements are recognized but will not be isolated as separate issues for research, because they are difficult to determine specifically in the situation of this study, just as they have been similarly acknowledged as complex and subtle in previous studies of young children's responses to artworks.

Finally, the age of the subjects is such that data collection periods need to be monitored for session duration. The attention span of the young child may be quite limited, and thus the amount of time spent in discussion will likely decrease according to the age of the subjects.

In summary, this study does not attempt to analyse in detail problems encountered in talking with children about artworks, (that is, the extent to which exposure, experience, cognition and language ability influence the proficiencies of children's responses), but rather sets out to identify a set of characteristics from which the researcher can analyze the nature of young children's aesthetic responses.

#### **3.4 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER**

This chapter has provided details of the conceptual framework which has been developed to illustrate the various components of the present study. From this framework a series of research questions have been presented to provide a more specific focus to the problem being investigated. The delimitations of the study have also been outlined. The following chapter provides information on the procedures used for data collection and analysis.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DESIGN OF THE STUDY**

## 4.0 DESIGN OF THE STUDY

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The method employed in this study was based on a descriptive and qualitative mode of research. A descriptive study can be defined as a study that describes and interprets 'what is'. It is concerned with conditions or relationships that exist, opinions that are held, processes that are going on, effects that are evident, or trends that are developing (Best, 1981, p. 93). A research instrument that is appropriate for obtaining the desired information must be constructed (Gay, 1981, p. 154).

The data collection technique used in this study is based on that used in a study conducted by Parsons, Johnston & Durham (1978). These authors focused on the stages of aesthetic development through which young children and adolescents pass. A series of topics and questions were identified and presented to the children using a loosely structured questioning procedure which allowed for further exploration of points "as it seemed desirable". On completion of the study, which involved children in grades one to twelve, Parsons et al. identified six topics which revealed developmental trends. A 'topic' was defined as a "coherent unit of discussion on which students were able to offer opinions and reasons for opinions" (Parsons, 1978, p. 87). The six topics included semblance, subject matter, colour, feeling, the artist's properties, and judgement. (Refer to the list of definitions on pages five to seven for an explanation of these terms.)

Although this study has not set out to replicate the findings of Parsons, as they relate to cognitive developmental changes in children's aesthetic responses, it has



instead used the *topics* identified by Parsons and his colleagues to explore further the aesthetic perceptions and preferences of young children. These topics represent the types of discussion that occur when talking about paintings.

#### 4.2 SAMPLE

The data obtained in this study was from a primary source, namely the first-hand responses of children within the kindergarten to year three age range. Primary sources of information are not only requisite for this particular research study, but they ultimately provide the most accurate and comprehensive forms of data.

The population from which these data were obtained was the kindergarten to grade three year levels, (five to eight year olds). The subjects selected were from a single school with both sexes represented in the sample to provide a balance of respondents.

Because each child was considered as a singular, 'bounded' case, a small sample was chosen on which to base the research. The sample of children were selected using a random sampling technique, ensuring a representative set of children from the defined population. The twelve children selected comprised three children from each year level. Due to the small sample selected, a simple random sampling procedure was undertaken. Three children were randomly chosen by the teacher from class lists, the only condition being that they were the appropriate age (for example, five years old at K-level, six years old in year 1).

In order to minimize bias, the socio-economic position of the sample was also taken into account. The school chosen for the study was deemed 'middle-of-the-

road' socio-economically. Thus, the possibility of the children within the school having had either substantial or inadequate exposure to art and its associated activities was considered minimal.

A structured oral interview was administered to obtain the data. Although the interview was 'formal' in that a set number of questions were asked, the interviewer was free to modify the sequence of questions, change the wording or explain them further. The purpose of an interview is best described by Tuckman (in Cohen & Manion, 1980, p. 243):

*By providing access to what is 'inside' a person's head, it makes it possible to measure what a person knows (knowledge or information), what a person likes or dislikes (values and preferences), and what a person thinks (attitudes and beliefs).*

Due to the young age of the subjects, the interview technique was considered a more appropriate method of data collection than other forms such as questionnaire responses. Interviews are generally flexible in nature thus enabling the interviewer to adapt the situation to each subject. They may also result in more accurate and honest responses since the interviewer can explain and clarify both the purpose of the research and individual questions. The researcher can also follow up incomplete or unclear responses by asking additional probing questions.

Although this method of research has certain advantages, there are also a number of limitations which need to be disclosed. For example, the conduct of interviews and interpretation of interview data is susceptible to the biases of the interviewer (Cohen & Manion, 1980, p. 242). Responses given by a subject may also be affected by his/her reaction to the interviewer, be it positive or negative. An

interviewer cannot obtain total objectivity because he/she is simultaneously part of the process and the observer in the process, but careful documentation of the behaviour setting and the format of the interview, as well as overt reference to the kinds of interpretation made about the data affords the reader a clear statement of the conduct and process of the interview.

The interview technique is both time consuming and expensive. Therefore, the number of subjects that can be handled, as indicated in the description of the sample, is considerably fewer than the numbers which can be studied using other techniques such as questionnaires.

### 4.3 PROCEDURES

#### 4.3.1 Access to Subjects and Equipment

A written request to the Principal of the target school, seeking permission to engage the students in the present study, was made (see Appendix 1). Two other schools were also selected as supplementary target schools in lieu of the initial school declining to participate. As no difficulty was experienced in gaining access to the target school and seeking permission to engage the students, the secondary measures were not called upon. Negotiations then occurred between the Principal, the teachers involved, and the researcher, to determine suitable times and locations for administering the interview.

The painting reproductions were obtained from the Art Department, Mount Lawley Campus, Western Australian College of Advanced Education, and taping facilities were arranged by the researcher.

#### 4.3.2 Data Collection Techniques

The selected children were shown two poster-sized painting reproductions (in colour). These paintings were:

1. "La Venditrice di Mele" by Pierre Auguste Renoir, chosen from the 'Starter' section of the "Art Reproduction Kit" (Art & Crafts Branch, Education Department of Western Australia). (see Appendix 2)
2. "Weeping Woman" by Pablo Picasso adopted from the study conducted by Parsons et al., (1978). (see Appendix 3)

These painting reproductions were chosen because they contained aspects highlighted by the literature as likely to elicit a response from the children. A balance of realism and abstraction was in the selection, and although both artworks are paintings, their methods of execution or style vary as well as the situations that they portray. The subject matter was not unfamiliar to children as it dealt primarily with people.

Each child was interviewed separately in an environment conducive to comfort and controlled for distractions, such as noise and pupil movement. A brief informal discussion took place before conducting each interview to set the subjects at ease. Due to the age of the respondents, the purpose of the interview was explained in simple terms, likening it to an informal 'picture talk'. Subjects were encouraged to take their time in responding and emphasis was placed on the fact that there was no 'right' or 'wrong' answer. Each child was asked to talk about what, why and how they felt about each reproduction.

At first the reproductions were shown separately to the child (hung on a wall or easel at the child's eye level). With each presentation the child was asked the questions which related to the topics of: semblance, subject matter, feeling, colour, the artist's properties and judgement.

Having considered each painting separately, both of the reproductions were then displayed. Each child was asked to state which painting he/she liked best and the reasons for his/her choice. Indications of the children's preferences may have already occurred before this final step, however it was still dealt with as a separate aspect of the topic 'judgement'.

The topics and related questions covered in the interview were pre-planned, but the actual ordering of the questions was determined by the subject's responses. After extending the child's response for further information or ideas, the interviewer then moved to the next topic until each section had been covered. Due to the age of the subjects, the interviewer sometimes needed to clarify what was being asked, therefore a comparison with an everyday 'life situation' was used to explain the question for each child. The verbal replies given by each child were recorded on a audio tape so that data could be reconsidered after the interview.

Each interview lasted between 30 to 45 minutes. The kindergarten subjects were interviewed in two stages on the same day to provide adequate time for an effective discussion. At the beginning of the session the child was presented with the first artwork for discussion (approximately 10 - 15 minutes). Towards the end of the session, the same child was shown the second artwork for discussion and subsequently presented with both artworks for a statement of preference (approximately 10 - 15 minutes). Although the research was conducted in third

term with most children in kindergarten displaying a greater concentration span, this method ensured that the interview would not lag due to lapses in the child's interest or concentration. The year one, two and three subjects, however, were interviewed at one sitting.

A small scale pilot study was conducted to assess the quality and validity of interview schedule and procedures. This pilot study involved four children representative of the population studied in the major phase. The pilot interview was carried out in a situation similar to the one in the research study. Based on the pilot study, the chosen topics or general interview procedures were refined. For example, the types of questions asked were rephrased to avoid repetitiveness. In addition, the pilot study confirmed that the data could be analyzed in the manner intended.

Draft and refined forms of questions used in the pilot study and the major study are included in Appendix 4 and 5. Several of these questions were chosen from Parsons et al., (1978), whilst the remainder of the questions were determined from the overall nature of the various topics.

It must also be noted that although the questions were ordered under six separate topics, there was some potential for overlap of the areas defined. For example, a question about 'judgement,' or which paintings the children preferred, may inevitably apply to the topic on 'colour' (i.e. the children preferred a painting because of its colour and therefore provided reasons based on the topic of colour). Thus, the *content* required careful analysis to see if responses fitted in with other topics as well as the one from which the question was asked. As a result, the data was subsequently analysed under five topics instead of six, with

'semblance' becoming a part of 'subject matter' (see Chapter 5, p. 52) for a further explanation).

#### **4.3.3 Ethics**

Ordinarily, it is justifiable to observe and record behaviour that is essentially public, behaviour that others normally would be in a position to observe. Assurances of confidentiality were thus given to the school Principal who followed his set procedures for dealing with confidentiality and the subjects were likewise coded using pseudonyms. On completion of the study the school is to be issued with a copy of the findings.

#### **4.4 DATA ANALYSIS**

The qualitative or naturalistic procedures used in this study considered the behaviour of human beings in the context of their occurrence. The empirical or quantitative mode of collecting and collating information and giving numbers to phenomena is not appropriate for this study, because the phenomena being observed requires a subjective response from each case.

The descriptive method employed in this study lends itself most effectively to content analysis. In this situation 'content analysis' can be defined as the "systematic, [qualitative], description of the composition of the object of the study' (Gay, 1981, p. 170). Within this study the 'object' was the aesthetic responses made by the child to a set of structured interview questions, and the 'composition' or phenomena of these responses was revealed in the child's perceptions and preferences of a set of visual artworks.

Because the present study was based on a previous study of Parsons, Johnston & Durham (1978), the areas for content analysis had already been determined. That is, the perceptions and preferences of the children were analyzed from the responses made under the *five topics* of subject matter, colour, feeling, the artist's properties and judgement (with semblance becoming part of subject matter). However, *specific characteristics* of response were determined from these broader topics. Prior to collecting the data for this study these characteristics were unknown, and were only determined by analysis of the resulting data. However, some indication was given via the small scale pilot study.

An analysis of each individual case was conducted and reported using transcribed documents made from the tape recorded interviews. Thus, the data are analyzed and presented in a written, descriptive format providing samples of the children's aesthetic responses.

The discussion is also presented in a way that allows it to refer to previous related research and theory. Corroborations and contradictions in the findings to previously conducted studies are discussed.

#### 4.5 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

The methods for collecting and analyzing the data presented in this study have been the main focus of Chapter Four. The procedure adopted to gather and analyze the data has been outlined to set the framework for considering Chapters Five and Six where the results are presented and discussed and where implications are made from these results.



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

## PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

### 5.0 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter outlines the discussion of results from the present study into the aesthetic responses of five to eight year old children to two painting reproductions. The discussion is centred around the four research questions which provided the focus for this study. These questions were set out in Chapter Three. Examples from the data gathered across the years K-3 are used to illustrate typical responses to the questions and to highlight particular features of responses. Support for salient features which characterized the young children's responses is also provided by reference to the documented literature. Particular attention is paid to the current work of Parsons (1987) because the present study developed from this work and made use of similar categories to analyse the children's responses. Furthermore, the issues of language, cognition, experience and exposure are also highlighted in this discussion.

As noted in Chapter Three, given the nature of these questions and the age of the respondents, discussion of results based on one research question may also apply to and support answers generated by the other three questions. Therefore, the presentation of findings in one question and the conclusions drawn from these findings may also apply to other questions. This is particularly so when discussing the focus areas of subject matter and semblance, colour, feeling, the artist's properties and judgement. These focus areas are fundamental to all four questions.

Furthermore, it should be noted that data gathered for analysis under the six topics originally described in Chapter 3 were consequently reduced to five. Semblance was incorporated with the broader topic of subject matter due to the similar focus that both topics addressed. In addition, Parsons (1987) presented his findings using four areas rather than the six topics which Parsons, Johnston and Durham (1978) had used in the original study. Parsons (1987) organized his account of aesthetic experience in terms of four ways of thinking about a painting: (1) subject matter, (2) expression, (3) medium, form and style, and (4) judgement. For the purposes of analysis in this study, the five topics of subject matter, colour, feeling, the artists properties and judgement will be used to discuss the children's responses because this study focused exclusively on young children and these topic areas were the most logical for the age group in question.

### 5.1 QUESTION ONE

*To what extent can young children perceive or respond to semblance, subject matter, colour, feeling, the artists properties and judgement within two given reproductions of artworks?*

This question was examined by asking the children a series of questions related to the subject matter, colour, feelings and artists properties of two painting reproductions. (See Appendix 5). Analysis of the results revealed that all the children were able to provide some response to the topics outlined above, and from these responses came a set of characteristics related to their perceptions of these topics. The following discussion presents notable features of the children's responses.

### 5.1.1 Subject Matter

Firstly, the children's responses to what was actually occurring or pictured within the two paintings varied according to each child's perceptions. The Renoir was easily identified but not uniformly described. It was associated with both a picnic scene and a lady selling or feeding apples to a group of others (often labelled as family members). The Picasso, however, provided a wider range of responses and these seemed to link mainly to each child's personal interpretations of the emotional or physical state of the subject pictured (see Table 1). In this sense, the subject matter described for the Picasso had close links to the attribute 'feeling' which is outlined in 5.1.3 below.

Based on overall responses to questions related to subject matter, it appeared that suggested subject matter which should be painted by artists was drawn from the children's own experiences or personal preferences. Animals, people and items within close proximity, (for example, "the oval" or "the school") dominated the children's responses to questions about appropriate subject matter for a painting. In addition, "happy" or "good" things were also suggested. "Happy" things included "puppies", "picnics" or "going to the park, playing nice, sharing toys", whilst "good" things also implied pleasant subject matter such as "people being nice" (see Table 2). In this way the subject matter of the Renoir was more in keeping with young children's views of appropriate subject matter than was the subject matter of the Picasso.

Indeed, it was indicated by the majority of children interviewed that artists should not paint about subject matter that was either "mean" or "sad". The explanations given centred mainly around the emotional effect that such paintings would have

Table 1  
Subject Matter: Perceptions of what is pictured

Perceptions of what is pictured / occurring		
	(i) RENOIR	(ii) PICASSO
JOHN (5 yrs)	Eating apples Playing	A man being frightened
SANDRA (5 yrs)	People have a picnic	A lady eating / crying
RACHEL (5 yrs)	A lady giving apples	A lady crying
JUSTIN (6 yrs)	Sharing food	A cranky lady
ELLEN (6 yrs)	A lady selling apples	A lady dancing / eating
SHANE (6 yrs)	A lady feeding / giving apples to the kids	A man walking
CAREN (7 yrs)	An old lady giving a woman and her two children some apples	A lady eating / crying
SHELLY (7 yrs)	A lady selling apples	A lady blowing her nose / crying
RICHARD (7 yrs)	A lady feeding apples to the others	An angry man
TIM (8 yrs)	A picnic	A woman crying
KEVIN (8 yrs)	Someone having a picnic	A priest / spirit / witch
NIKKY (8 yrs)	A lady selling apples	A lady telling her kids off / crying/ scratching her face

Table 2  
Subject Matter: Things which artists should paint

What kinds of things should artists paint about?	
JOHN (5 yrs)	People Cats and rabbits Good things, eg., people being nice
SANDRA (5 yrs)	Picnics Animals Happy things, eg., puppies, picnics
RACHEL (5 yrs)	The same as their family The same as their house, the same as everything in their family Happy things, eg. going to the park, playing nice, sharing toys
JUSTIN (6 yrs)	Happy things, eg. when you go out for a picnic, when you go out for school Experts, ie. people who do things
ELLEN (6 yrs)	Some grass and rainbow at the top of the sun Animals and some grass and everything Happy things
SHANE (6 yrs)	People having picnics or buying things Animals, eg. a big bear or a lizard or a tiger
CAREN (7 yrs)	Houses and animals, people
SHELLY (7 yrs)	Cars School books, houses with people, people reading books and people talking, people teaching other people things
RICHARD (7 yrs)	Ideas to do by themselves Animals Happy things
TIM (8 yrs)	Plenty of things, eg. the oval, the school, ...a house with lots of detail and colour in it About anything
KEVIN (8 yrs)	Violence, eg. stuff like the news Music, eg. stuff like Queen but not quite so heavy
NIKKY (8 yrs)	Animals, people, trees or a forest, maybe a bush

on other people. These responses appear to be based on the way the children themselves feel towards such topics. For example, eight year old Nikky explained that "mean" things are inappropriate "because it makes you feel cross".

The Renoir, considered a "good thing" to paint about, drew comments from these children about 'pleasant' happenings which may ensue. For example, six year old Shane considered the subject matter and explained that "people won't be poor". This comment appears to have Shane project 'daily life' into the painting and imagine life as the picture. The merits of painting such a picture in this case seem to be connected to beneficial or moral properties. Five year old John's response "because you could grow" also illustrates this interest in what is humanely beneficial. This notion of moral distinctions is explored further in subsequent discussion.

The Picasso, on the other hand, was generally considered *not* a good thing to paint about, primarily because it dealt with a "sad" situation. The responses given seemed to indicate that the children expected everyone to feel the same way they would. For example, Sandra, five years old, stated "because it makes people sad", attributing this sadness more to her own feelings about the painting. Seven year old Caren also suggested that "it makes the other person who is looking at it cry or sad", and Nikky, eight years old, added "it makes you start to cry and you feel like tearing it up". These responses also appear to illustrate what Parsons (1987, p. 44) refers to as the 'indefinite other'. According to Parsons, children assume that they know how other people feel and essentially these feelings are the same as those held by the children themselves. The other is not a particular person and therefore becomes an 'indefinite other', often described in terms such as "they" or "people".

In terms of what the children would change about the subject matter depicted (or what the artist could have done differently), personal preferences and the children's notions of reality appeared to guide their responses. For example, in reference to the Renoir, five year old John claimed he would like to change "the dog into a cat and a rabbit on there", the reason being "because I want to". Seven year old Richard, however, suggested that the artist "could have made the road all one colour" because "all the roads here are all one colour...with a white line down the middle". (see Table 3). Concerns for depicting reality is an issue addressed in more depth in the discussion dealing with children's preferences for elements contained within an artwork (see Question 3 and 4, in particular).

Suggested changes to the Picasso also focused heavily on subject matter and a concern for imitating what is 'real'. For example, seven year old Caren suggested to "do a proper face and make her a happy face". Here, Caren is also indicating changes to the emotional state of the subject matter as well as its physical appearance. Eight year old Nikky also preferred to see changes to make "the face to a happy face...the hair in one colour...and put red rosy cheeks instead of purple". The reasons provided for changes of subject matter appeared to reflect what appealed personally to the children and endorsed the notion of pleasant subject matter for paintings (see Table 3).

### 5.1.2 Colour

The aspect of 'colour', along with subject matter, was a primary focus of attention in the aesthetic responses made by the children. Despite the fact that not all the children may have liked the subject matter of either the Renoir or the Picasso, the colours of both paintings appealed to each subject. This appeal was largely based



Table 3  
Subject Matter: Changes to be made

	(i) RENOIR		(ii) PICASSO	
	What should the artist change or have done differently?	Reason given	What should the artist change or have done differently?	Reason given
JOHN (5 yrs)	To have it all boys The dog and the cat and the rabbit on there	Because I would Because I want to	The hat, the hair, to water the flower, to draw a real man	-
SANDRA (5 yrs)	The dog as a cat and the fish lying on the floor for the cat to eat	Because the dog doesn't belong in the picnic	Hands that are tiny	
RACHEL (5 yrs)	Wet clothes	Because it would be a rainy day	Nothing	
JUSTIN (6 yrs)	The whole thing	-	The face - to a bright nice face	Because it's cranky
ELLEN (6 yrs)	The apples green The colours of the clothes	Because I have them at home Because I like the rainbow	Change the colours on the person	Because they're not different colours and they're not nice soft colours
SHANE (6 yrs)	Shift the lady around	So the lady can pat the dog	Change the colours around	-

Table 3 (cont.)  
Subject Matter: Changes to be made

	(i) RENOIR		(ii) PICASSO	
	What should the artist change or have done differently?	Reason given	What should the artist change or have done differently?	Reason given
CAREN (7 yrs)	Add some birds	-	Do a proper face and make her a happy face	-
SHELLY (7 yrs)	The lady with the food, sitting down Could put some flowers into it A little bit of river	-	He could have made the face a bit better, a better colour	-
RICHARD (7 yrs)	He could have made the road all one colour	Cause all the roads here are all one colour...with a white line down the middle	[Wouldn't want to change anything]	Because I like it
TIM (8 yrs)	Change a bit of the grass on the bottom... to a bit of light green	-	The face...into a colour that match the skin	-

Table 3 (cont.)  
Subject Matter: Changes to be made

(i) RENOIR		(ii) PICASSO	
What should the artist change or have done differently?	Reason given	What should the artist change or have done differently?	Reason given
KEVIN (8 yrs)	Well I would put in a picnic rug and I'd probably put a bit more of the family in and I'd probably make some apple trees near the lady with the apples	Because it will sort of make sense with the picture so you can tell if they got it from home or not	-
NIKKY (8 yrs)	People standing up	So they can look at all the fruit	Change the face to a happy face...the hair in one colour...and put red rosy cheeks instead of purple

on the colour's "brightness" or "softness", because the colours "looked nice" or because they were an individual child's "favourite". The colours of the Renoir also made most of the children feel either "good" or "happy" for the above properties, and although the subject matter of the Picasso made the children feel 'sad', the colours also made them feel both "good" and "happy". For example, seven year old Shelly stated that the colours of the Renoir made her feel "good" because "they're all nice and bright". "Sad" feelings indicated appeared to be connected with the tonal qualities of the colours. For example, eight year old Nikky explained that the colours made her feel both "happy and sad" because the "light colours make me feel happy and the black colours, like the dark colours, make me feel sad". The colours, therefore, appear to be considered by themselves, as having an expressive character regardless of context (Parsons, 1987, p. 64).

When asked whether the colours of the paintings were "happy" or "sad" the general response was that the colours of both the Renoir and the Picasso were "happy". The reasons offered, however, varied considerably and seemed to be linked to different criteria. For example, with the Renoir the colours were "happy" because the subjects depicted in the painting were "smiling". However, the colours were also happy due to properties contained within them. For example, they were "pretty" or "bright". Those colours which were considered "sad" were usually those which were dark. For example, seven year old Caren explained that the colours in the Renoir were "sad" because "they're darker", notably the "black, brown and purple" (see Table 4 [A]). Eight year old Kevin put this idea in another way, apparently connecting the appearance of the colours with his own feelings: the colours were "sad" because "they look so old and old colours make me feel as if it's sort of saddish". Unlike the Renoir, there were no

Table Four  
Colours

	(i) RENOIR _____ (A) _____		(ii) PICASSO _____ (A) _____	
	Are the colours happy / sad? Reason given	Are the colours good / bad? Reason given	Are the colours happy / sad? Reason given	Are the colours good / bad? Reason given
JOHN (5yrs)	H Because I can see the smiles	G Because they look good	H The nice hats in them	G Because they are
SANDRA (5yrs)	H Because they're pretty colours	-	H Because they look nice	G Because they look nice
RACHEL (5yrs)	H I don't know	G Because I like the colours	S I don't know	G I don't know
JUSTIN (6yrs)	S Because of the colours e.g., red, brown, blue	G Because they look bright and good	H Cause they're nice and bright	G Cause they're nice and bright and yellowish
ELLEN (6yrs)	H Because they're smiling about the apples	G Because they're nice and soft	-	G Because they're nice and soft
SHANE (6yrs)	-	G I don't know	-	G Because some of them are the rainbow colours

H = happy; S = sad; G = good; B = bad

Table Four (cont.)  
Colours

	(i) RENOIR		(ii) PICASSO	
	(A)	(B)	(A)	(B)
	Are the colours happy / sad? Reason given	Are the colours good / bad? Reason given	Are the colours happy / sad? Reason given	Are the colours good / bad? Reason given
CAREN (7yrs)	S Because they're darker e.g., black, & brown, purple H Because they're brighter e.g., blue, red, white, yellow and green	G Because it's bright	H Because they're nice and bright	G -
SHELLY (7yrs)	H Because most people like them colours	G Because of the way they've been mixed	H Because the purple people like and red, yellow and black people like	G Because all the windows on the shops have those sort of colours
RICHARD (7yrs)	H Because they're bright	G Cause they're bright	H Cause they're bright	G Because they're nice and bright

H - happy; S - sad; G - good; B - bad

Table Four (cont.)  
Colours

	(i) RENOIR		(ii) PICASSO	
	(A)	(B)	(A)	(B)
	Are the colours happy / sad? Reason given	Are the colours good / bad? Reason given	Are the colours happy / sad? Reason given	Are the colours good / bad? Reason given
TIM (8yrs)	H Cause some bright colours and some dark colours are happy colours while some others are sort of angry and sad colours	G Because they're quite colourful	H Sort of mixed up	G Because the background sort of stands out
KEVIN (8yrs)	H / S Because the colours look so old and old colours make me feel as if it's sort of saddish	G Because it's in a picture	H Because most people like these sort	G -
NIKKY (8yrs)	-	G Because it's nice and bright...and it makes the picture stand out	-	G The good colours / make me feel happy B and the bad, the black colours make me feel sad

H = happy; S = sad; G = good; B = bad

links made between the appearance of the Picasso's subject matter and the feelings evoked by the colours. Rather, the colours were considered "happy" mainly because of their "brightness" and because "they look nice".

When discussing whether the colours of either painting were "good" or "bad", the overall response for both paintings was that the colours were "good". Several reasons, similar to those given for liking the colours, were offered when determining the 'goodness' of the colours. These reasons included the "brightness" or "softness" of the colours or simply because they looked "good" or "nice". Seven year old Shelly also suggested that the colours of the Renoir were "good" because "of the way they've been mixed", thus indicating a response to the technique used by the artist. A similar response to technique was observed by eight year old Tim and Nikky who noted in both paintings the way in which colours made the "picture" or "background" "stand out". These observations were claimed by Tim and Nikky as the reason that the colours were "good" colours (see Table 4 [B]).

Association of particular colours to situations or objects also determined whether they were good colours. For example, six year old Shane explained that the colours of the Picasso were good "because some of them are the rainbow colours", perhaps implying that 'good' colours have the properties contained within the rainbow. Seven year old Shelly also drew a link between the Picasso's colours and those used in the physical world. That is, she considered the colours 'good' "because all the windows on the shops have those sort of colours".



### 5.1.3 Feelings

Feelings have already emerged as part of children's responses to subject matter and colour. Two dimensions become the centre of attention here. Firstly, feelings within the paintings and secondly the way the paintings made the children themselves feel were deemed significant lines of enquiry. A specific focus was also placed on the children's ability to take on the perspective of another individual.

When discussing the feelings contained in the Renoir, most of the children responded using the terms "happy" or "good". The reasons for these happy or good feelings were normally associated with the appearance of the subject matter. For example, the "smiles" on the subjects faces indicated the "good" or "happy" feeling within the painting (see Table 5). Several of the younger children also clarified their explanations using metaphorical descriptions. For example, Rachel, five years old, described a "good feeling" as being "like a kitten or a dog or a giraffe", thus associating the term with pleasant, possibly personal, experiences.

Likewise, the "sad" feelings that were identified within the Picasso appeared to be a result of how the subject matter appeared to the children. For example, the painting contained a sad feeling "because the lady is crying" or because of "the eyes" or "the sad face". This aspect of attributing feelings more to characters within the artwork than to the children's own feelings was also documented by Parsons, Johnston and Durham (1978). Furthermore, Parsons (1987, p. 61) noted that young children do not see paintings as being expressive, rather the paintings represent people who have feelings. Secondly, these feelings are conceived concretely and expressed in behavioural terms such as "the eyes".

Table 5  
Feelings

	(i) RENOIR		(ii) PICASSO	
	What feelings are <u>within</u> the painting?	Reason given	What feelings are <u>within</u> the painting?	Reason given
JOHN (5 yrs)	A 'good feeling' like 'being happy'		Don't know	
SANDRA (5 yrs)	Happy	Because they're having a picnic	Sad	Because he's crying
RACHEL (5 yrs)	Good feelings like a kitten or a dog or a giraffe		Sad	Because of the eyes
JUSTIN (6 yrs)	Happy feelings	Because they've got smiles on their faces	A cranky one	
ELLEN (6 yrs)	Happy feelings	Because her and her and her, she's happy	Angry-said feeling	
SHANE (6 yrs)	Happy feelings	Because the lady and the two girls are smiling	Happy	Because he's smiling
CAREN (7 yrs)	Happy feelings	Because they're nearly all smiling	A said feeling	

Table 5 (cont.)  
Feelings

(i) RENOIR		(ii) PICASSO	
What feelings are <u>within</u> the painting?	Reason given	What feelings are <u>within</u> the painting?	Reason given
SHELLY (7 yrs)	Nice feelings	Because they're all friendly	Sad feelings Because the lady is crying
RICHARD (7 yrs)	I don't know		I don't know
TIM (8 yrs)	Happy	Because of the smile on the boy's face	Sad
KEVIN (8 yrs)	Hungry	Because afterall they're having a picnic	
NIKKY (8 yrs)	Sad	Because the lady hasn't got very much money or food	A sad face

The appeal of the colours as well as the subject matter tended to influence the way the children themselves felt about the paintings. Single word descriptions such as "happy" and "good" were often used to explain the children's feelings. The Renoir made seven year old Richard feel "good" because "it's got nice bright colours in it". The reasons offered for these feelings also appeared to take on a humane perspective. For example, six year old Shane replied that the Renoir made him feel "happy" because "the people won't be poor". Thus, this response reflects Shane's personal interpretation of the situation depicted.

On the other hand, responses to the Picasso, with respect to feelings, were more varied. These responses appeared to depend on the children's perceptions, and apply to both colour, subject matter and the painting's construction. Although most of the children felt "sad" because of the subject matter's sad appearance, several children responded in positive overtones. For example, eight year old Kevin felt "happy" because "it would make the artist feel happy" to paint such a picture. This response implies that the artist has succeeded in presenting a message – quite a sophisticated observation on the part of this child. Seven year old Richard also felt "good" because of "the colours" which were appealing. In contrast, eight year old Nikky felt "mad" because "you can't see all of her...you can only see one hand", thus her response appeared to be prompted by an interest in representing reality and a concern about the artist's construction of the painting.

Although most of the children were able to determine that not everybody would feel the same way as they did about the two paintings, they were often unable to explain why someone may feel differently or what any of these different feelings may be. Several children suggested that it was because "everyone has different

feelings". Nevertheless, when probed to establish the nature of these 'different' feelings the response tended to be "I don't know". Looking at the Renoir, five year old Sandra suggested that someone may possibly feel "sad" because the person viewing the painting "is not having a picnic", whilst seven year old Shelly thought that the painting may make someone feel "yuk" because "there's not very many colours in it". The Picasso, despite it making the children themselves feel "sad" may make another person feel "happy" because "it's got nice colours" or for reasons "unknown".

#### 5.1.4 The Artist's Properties

Questions asked about this topic encouraged the children to think about elements such as the painting's physical construction and the degree of difficulty involved. In addition, consideration of the abilities of each artist was made.

Generally, both paintings were considered hard to do. The reasons offered mainly related to the size of the paintings, the amount or type of subject matter pictured, the time taken to paint the picture or the technique employed by the artist when painting it (see Table 6). The idea of painting "carefully", "neatly", or as six year old Shane suggested, "trying to make it look nice", also seemed to determine the degree of difficulty children attributed to the production of these paintings..

The majority of children considered the Renoir to be easier to produce than the Picasso. The reasons offered were mainly to do with a supposed shorter length of time taken to paint the Picasso and with the overall size of the painting. For example, eight year old Kevin stated that the artist did the Renoir "real slow"

Table 6  
Artist's Properties: Complexity of construction

Would the painting have been hard to do? Why?			
	(i) RENOIR	(ii) PICASSO	
JOHN (5 yrs)	Y Because he had to do it carefully	Y	The hair - because there are so many little spaces
SANDRA (5 yrs)	Y Because the bodies are too skinny and thin	Y	Because it's big
RACHEL (5 yrs)	N Because people are easy to paint	Y	Because people are easy to paint
JUSTIN (6 yrs)	Y Because it took a long time	Y	Because it's done neatly and it took him a whole day
ELLEN (6 yrs)	Y Because the artist had to paint the lady while she sat on a chair	Y	Because he's done a lot of painting and you get sore arms
SHANE (6 yrs)	Y Trying to make it look nice	Y	Because they were trying to make it good
CAREN (7 yrs)	Y Because he's joining the colours He mixed the colours	Y	The face is hard
SHELLY (7 yrs)	Y Because how he's mixed the colours in some of them Might have taken him a long time	Y	Because they might have had to use maybe a week to do it
RICHARD (7 yrs)	Y Cause there's so many things there	Y	Cause it's big and it's got lots of colours in it
TIM (8 yrs)	Y Cause there's no drawing in it All the background	Y	Because the faced is all muddled up and it looks like pieces of some other thing
KEVIN (8 yrs)	Y It would have taken him quite a long time but if he's had a lot of practice it wouldn't be quite so hard	Y	Because the hair overlaps He's done it all different colours
NIKKY (8 yrs)	Y To draw all the people and the dog	Y	Because it's a big picture and because it'll take a long time to paint it and draw it

Y - Yes; N - No

Table 7  
Artist's Properties: Comparison of construction

Which painting would have been the easiest? Why?		
JOHN (5yrs)	Renoir	Because it hasn't got so much little spots
SANDRA (5yrs)	Renoir	Because it's smaller
RACHEL (5yrs)	Renoir	I don't know
JUSTIN (6yrs)	Renoir	Because it didn't take as long as the Picasso
ELLEN (6yrs)	Renoir	Because it doesn't take very long
SHANE (6yrs)	Renoir	They put different colours in. They put a dog and person
CAREN (7yrs)	Picasso	Because the colours are mixed together (on the Renoir)
SHELLY (7 yrs)	Renoir	Because it would have taken half a week...because it's smaller and it's got less things in it and less colours
RICHARD (7 yrs)	Picasso	Cause it looks like it's done in crayon
TIM (8yrs)	Picasso	Because the Renoir has more background, trees and grass
KEVIN (8 yrs)	Renoir	Because he did it real slow and the Picasso he did quickly
NIKKY (8 yrs)	Renoir	Because there's not many colours...and he probably didn't draw it first, he just probably painted it

whereas the Picasso "he did quickly" and five year old Sandra stated that the Renoir was easier "because it's smaller". Those children who considered the Picasso easier to paint were primarily concerned with the small amount of subject matter and the painting's construction (see Table 7).

When questioned about what attributes were necessary in order to be really good at painting or to produce good pictures, most of the children's responses dealt with the artist's physical, observable abilities and artistic skill. Generally, the children considered that a good artist must be good at painting, drawing, colouring-in, and writing. This dimension of 'physical' or 'concrete' qualities was also apparent when children were determining what artists "need" to paint good paintings. For example, most children claimed an artist needed physical items such as paint, pencils, paintbrushes, textas and water.

#### 5.1.5 Judgement

Several interview questions were directed towards establishing the children's preferences for a particular painting and the reasons given to support those choices. When asked whether they considered the Renoir and the Picasso to be "good" paintings the majority of responses indicated "yes". The reasons offered for these opinions appeared to deal with five main areas, namely the appeal of the painting's subject matter, the colours, its approximation to reality, the skill employed in the painting and it's overall physical appearance.

Subject matter which the children found personally appealing dominated the judgements of the Renoir. Five year old Rachel, for example, considered the painting to be good "because I like the clothes". Furthermore, subject matter



which was "good" or "nice" appeared in the children's explanations about their judgements. The colours were judged as making the painting good mainly because they were "soft and nice", "good", "bright" or varied. The painting's physical appearance seemed to prompt comments relating to detail or what the painting depicted overall, as seven year old Caren claimed, "it's a nice drawing of people" (see Table 8).

Generally, the Picasso was also judged as "good" because of the "nice", "different", "bright" or "pretty" colours which it contained. Referral to subject matter was not as prevalent as it was with the Renoir, but the overall physical appearance did appear to influence the responses of several children. This was evident in comments such as "it looks nice" or "it's done nice and neatly". Reasons given for judging the painting as "not good" seemed to centre around the subject matter's appearance and the child's notions of reality. For example, eight year old Tim explained that it "looks sort of muddled up". Whether Tim was referring to emotions evoked by the painting or the physical construction of the work is difficult to discern. Eight year old Nikky, on the other hand, appreciated the painting for its colour and subject matter but did not consider it totally "good" because "it's scary and it has dark colours" (see Table 8).

Questions aimed at assessing what these children looked for when judging a painting as good or otherwise were also asked. The majority of responses featured colour, subject matter and the painting's physical appearance as key attributes. For example, seven year old Caren claimed that "bright colours in it...and nice pictures of things" made a painting a good one. Furthermore, responses appeared to revolve around personal preferences within the areas of colour, subject matter and physical appearance.

Table 8  
Judgement

	(i) RENOIR		(ii) PICASSO	
	Is it a good painting? Why?	Influence	Is it a good painting? Why?	Influence
JOHN (5 yrs)	Y Because it has a boy in it It has different colours	Subject Matter  Colour	N Because I said so	-
SANDRA (5 yrs)	Y Because they're having a picnic It looks nice	Subject Matter  Physical Appearance	Y Because it looks nice	Physical Appearance
RACHEL (5 yrs)	Y Because I like the clothes Favourite colours	Subject Matter Colour	Y Because of the colours	Colour
JUSTIN (6 yrs)	Y Because it's got good stuff in it e.g., the dog, apples, dresses It took a long time	Subject Matter  Skill	Y Because it's cranky It's done nice and neatly	Skill Physical Appearance
ELLEN (6 yrs)	Y Because it's got lots of colours Soft and nice colours	Colour	Y Because it's got different colours	Colour

Y = Yes; N = No

Table 8 (cont.)  
Judgement

(i) RENOIR				(ii) PICASSO			
		Is it a good painting? Why?	Influence			Is it a good painting? Why?	Influence
SHANE (6 yrs)	Y	It's got nice colours Good colours	Colour	Y	Because they put nice colours	Colour	
CAREN (7 yrs)	Y	Because it's got nice colours It's a nice drawing of people	Colour  Physical Appearance	Y	Because of the bright colours	Colour	
SHELLY (7 yrs)	Y	Because the dog and people look nice Because it's big	Subject Matter/ Physical Appearance Physical Appearance	Y	Because if somebody had it in their house it will teach the little kids not to be silly	Physical Appearance	
RICHARD (7 yrs)	Y	Because it's got nice colours and it's got good pictures	Colour Subject Matter	Y	Cause it just is It's got nice, pretty, bright colours	Colour	

Y = Yes; N = No

Table 8 (cont.)  
Judgement

(i) RENOIR			(ii) PICASSO		
	Is it a good painting? Why?	Influence		Is it a good painting? Why?	Influence
TIM (8 yrs)	Y Because of all the detail The colour really stands out All the bright colours	Physical Appearance  Colour	N	Because it looks sort of muddled up	Realism
KEVIN (8 yrs)	Y The artist who did it put in a lot of expression and stuff, so you can actually tell they're having a picnic	Realism	Y	You can really tell it's a girl Because it's got all expression, you can tell	Subject Matter  Realism
NIKKY (8 yrs)	Y Because there's lots of colours, different colours The people have nice clothes on and there's nice leaves	Colour	Y	Because of the colours and I like & the hat	Colour/ Subject Matter
			N	Because it's scary and it has dark colours	Colour/ Subject Matter

Y = Yes; N = No

With respect to the two paintings in this study, colour, subject matter and physical appearance were also the main factors determining which painting a child liked best. Of the two, the Renoir was considered to have the most appeal, primarily because of the "nice" colours and the amount and type of subject matter. It was liked best because "it's got more things in it" and those 'things' were generally "nice" things, such as the hats, the dog and the food. Nevertheless, the Picasso was also liked by some children simply because it "looks better" than the Renoir. Seven year old Shelly found it appealing because "it's in cartoon" and therefore it's physical appearance was of greater appeal to her than the Renoir (see Table 9).

## 5.2 CASE SUMMARIES WITH RESPECT TO TOPICS IN QUESTION 1

The following discussion highlights the defining attributes of each case in relation to the various topics of subject matter, feelings, colour, the artist's properties and judgement. In this sense the responses detailed in this section reflect the nature of the first research question. That is, the extent to which the children perceive and respond to the above topics.

### Kindergarten Subjects

#### 5.2.1 John

John's response to the subject matter of both paintings appeared to be the dominant feature which emerged in his discussion. Essentially, he considered the Renoir a "good" painting because it contained subject matter which appealed to

Table 9  
Judgement: Preference

	Which one do you like the best? Why?		Preference
JOHN (5yrs)	Renoir	Because it's got better colours than the Picasso	Colour
SANDRA (5yrs)	Renoir	Because it looks nice	Physical Appearance
RACHEL (5yrs)	Renoir	Because of the trees and the hats	Subject Matter
JUSTIN (6yrs)	Renoir	Because it's got nice colours	Colour
ELLEN (6yrs)	Renoir	Because it's nice and great Because they've got nice faces and happy smiling faces	Physical Appearance Subject Matter
SHANE (6yrs)	Picasso	Because it's got more colours	Colour
CAREN (7yrs)	Renoir	Because it's got more things in it e.g., a dog, food, more people	Physical Appearance Subject Matter
SHELLY (7yrs)	Picasso	Because it's in cartoon	Physical Appearance
RICHARD (7yrs)	Picasso	Because it's not the same as the Renoir It's got some colours that the other one hasn't	Colour
TIM (8yrs)	Renoir	Because it's more colourful than the Picasso	Colour
KEVIN (8yrs)	Picasso	Because it looks much better than the Renoir	Physical Appearance
NIKKY (8yrs)	Renoir	Because there's not much black in there and there's not much dark colours in there Because it has nice things e.g., basket, hats and dog	Subject Matter

him, namely the dog, "because I like dogs". John's personal preference however, seemed to direct the changes he suggested could be made to the painting. For example, despite stating a liking for dogs, he suggested "the dog into a cat...because I want to". His response to the Picasso's subject matter also showed links to previous experiences. For example, John stated that it "looks like something from Star Wars", thus indicating previous exposure to the film. In addition, he responded to the Picasso by claiming it was a painting of "a man" being "frightened" or "eating cards". Consequently, changes which he suggested the artist make would include "no long hair and no ribbon on his hat".

### 5.2.2 Sandra

Sandra's perception of the lady in the Renoir holding a "fish" appeared to be an attempt to guess what the subject matter of the painting depicted. This was also evident in her response to the Picasso where she suggested that it could be a picture of a lady "eating a sweet". Furthermore, Sandra's attempt to take on the perspective of another was reflected in her response to whether everyone would feel the same way about the Renoir as she did. She responded by saying "no" because "some people think different things", a possible "sad" feeling that someone may have was thus explained by suggesting that it is "because they're not having the picnic".

### 5.2.3 Rachel

A strong association with the subject matter of the Renoir was a key feature of Rachel's response to the two paintings. Her responses projected away from the painting to personal preference. She appeared keenly interested in the clothing of

the subjects depicted and stated that the painting was a "good" one primarily "because of the clothes". Furthermore, changes suggested to the paintings involved making the clothes "wet clothes" because "it would be a rainy day". In addition she claimed that the artist should have painted the clothing of the subjects in a way that was realistically correct. This idea was expressed in Rachel's comment that "three sleeves are down and one is up", and the artist should therefore have "put the other one down". Finally, in relation to the subject matter and specifically the clothing, Rachel presumed that to produce a good painting an artist needed to be really good at "painting wardrobes"!

### Year One Subjects

#### 5.2.4 Justin

A preoccupation with physical properties such as length of time and the size of a painting, when determining the difficulty of its construction, were the main aspects of Justin's response. For example, both the Renoir and Picasso would have been hard paintings to do because they took the artist "a long time". Evidence of the Renoir taking a long time was given in physical, observable terms - "because its nice and old", and the painting appeared "old" because of the "colours" used by the artist. With the Picasso, the physical size of the painting and the artist's signature (which is included on the reproduction print) were taken as indicators that the painting would have taken a long time. This was expressed by Justin in his referral to the "big face and the big writing".



### 5.2.5 Ellen

The language used by Ellen to describe her perceptions of the two paintings as well as her response to the difficulties of painting were the salient characteristics in this case. Descriptive phrases were used by Ellen to explain techniques employed by the artist. For example, the colours of the Renoir were "soft" because "they're washed", whereas the colours of the Picasso made her feel "happy" and the explanation - "because it's like the rainbow and the gold" - was illustrative of a child using metaphorical language. The difficulty of painting the Renoir was also described by Ellen in a way which linked its complexity to the physical being of the artist rather than to elements in the painting itself. For example, the painting would be hard to do "because he's done a lot of painting and you get sore arms".

### 5.2.6 Shane

Shane's perception of what the Picasso depicted appeared to prompt impulsive and changing responses. Originally, he stated that the painting was of "a big man walking to a party", but after additional questioning he changed this response to "a lady" because she had "a bow and a girls hat". As the discussion progressed, however, he reverted to his first perception of it being a man walking. A further indication of impulsive observation was that he also claimed the man to be "smiling" because "his mouth is open".

## Year Two Subjects

### 5.2.7 Caren

Attention to the colour and construction of the paintings was one of the main features of Caren's response. With the Renoir, for example, she attributed feelings of happiness or sadness within the colours to their tonal qualities. That is, a "happy" colour was essentially "brighter" whilst a "sad" colour was one which was "darker than the brighter colours". An attempt was also made to explain the technique employed by the artist in applying these colours. For example, the Renoir would be hard to paint because the artist "joined the colours". This statement was then clarified by an explanation of how the artist painted the ladies' dresses - "he's mixed the colours, like the red dress has a little bit of white and orange, and the white dress has some pink and a little bit of green".

### 5.2.8 Shelly

The association of elements within the Picasso to physical objects or possible situations was one of the notable aspects to emerge in Shelly's response. Initially, for example, she identified with the Picasso as a "cartoon" primarily because "it's sort of scary and in cartoons they do that". The painting was also considered to be a "good" one from a moralistic or 'teaching' perspective. Shelly explained that "if somebody had it in their house it will teach the little kids not to be silly". In addition, she associated the colours in the painting with those she has encountered in day-to-day life. For example, the colours of the Picasso are "good" because they conform to reality "all the windows on the shops have those sort of colours".

### 5.2.9 Richard

Comments dealing primarily with the artist were provided by Richard whilst discussing both the Renoir and the Picasso. For example, in response to the types of things that artists could paint about, Richard suggested that "they could think up ideas to do by themselves". This response may refer to the quality of free choice associated with painting sessions and perhaps values a degree of originality. In terms of the Picasso, Richard also explained that artists should paint people by "copying" them and therefore portray them closer to reality. Thus Richard's responses to these paintings appeared diverse, one highlighting freedom and the other noting the importance of accurate reproduction.

## Year Three Subjects

### 5.2.10 Tim

The main aspects of Tim's response to the paintings was his perception of subject matter and the inclusion of past experience for determining the 'value' of what was depicted. The subject matter of the Renoir, for example, was judged as "good" by comparing it with a 'recognized' "good" artwork. His sister had previously painted a "big" picture of an "octopus" which was considered a 'good' painting. Tim's idea of the type of subject matter artist's should paint about was also based on this previous experience with recognized artworks. For example, "a sleeping gypsy" and an "olden day picture" which he saw in an "encyclopedia" were considered appropriate kinds of subject matter.

### 5.2.11 Kevin

Kevin used the word "expression" to describe what was occurring in the paintings. In this situation the term "expression" appeared to be unrelated to the artist's personal expression, but rather referred to the subject matter. For example, the Renoir was considered a "good" painting because it contained "expression" and this was clarified through Kevin's explanation "that you can actually tell that they're having a picnic or that's a family". Furthermore, the Picasso was liked the best of the two paintings not only because "it looks much better", but also because "its got all expression".

### 5.2.12 Nikky

A strong preference for pleasant subject matter that reflects what is real or normal was evident in Nikky's discussion of the Picasso. To begin with, changes suggested for the painting included making the face a "happy" one and the "hair in one colour" and "red rosy cheeks instead of purple". Nikky also expressed annoyance at the bodily proportions of the subject matter. The painting made her feel "sad and mad" because "you can't see all of her..you can only see one hand". As a result, she indicated that the artist could have changed the picture by making "a little person so you can see all of it" and by putting "a smaller head" and making sure "the head and the feet are in and you can see the hands" and "the face is a happy face and not a mad or a sad face".

In summary, these children responded in similar ways through an over riding concern with subject matter and colour, but also demonstrated idiosyncratic behaviour through some of their responses. Differences may have related to

previous experience and exposure to artworks, facility with language, or level of cognitive skill. However, what is apparent is that young children do perceive and respond to artworks and they react to subject matter, colour, feeling and the artist's properties when making judgements.

### 5.3 QUESTION TWO

*What is the nature of young children's perceptions/responses regarding semblance, subject matter, feeling, the artists properties and judgement within two given reproductions of artwork?*

This question is closely linked to the first, however the focus is directed more at the nature of the children's responses. In particular, six salient points seem to characterize the nature of responses made by the children in this study. These points, namely egocentrism, free association, a tendency towards impulsive response to parts of a painting rather than reflective response to the whole, a sense of pleasure, metaphorical descriptions and confusion between moral and aesthetic considerations are discussed below.

#### 5.3.1 Egocentrism

A notable characteristic that emerged from the responses made by the children was the egocentric nature of their perspectives. Essentially, the children seemed unable to take the perspective of another and did not seem to grasp fully the concept of differences in opinions between themselves and others. This characteristic was apparent in the children's responses to a variety of questions under the different topics. For example, although the children were able to state that not everyone would 'feel the same way' about a painting as they did, they were unable to give possible examples or reasons for those different feelings. According to Parsons (1987) this exemplifies the position that children of this age do not yet realize that others do not see and feel as they do, simply because they themselves have not distinguished between their own point of view and the point of view of another. While this may be so, the lack of giving examples or reasons for differences in the feelings of others may also relate to a child's facility with

language. However, these results also correlate with the findings of Rosentiel, Morison, Silverman and Gardner (1978) and Parsons, Johnston and Durham (1978) who likewise stated that young children often assume that others respond to artworks in the same way they do.

Egocentricity of response was originally identified by Piaget as characteristic of the preoperational child's behaviour. Within this stage, egocentric responses are not egocentric by intent. According to Wadsworth (1989, p.69) the young child remains unaware that he is egocentric and consequently does not seek to resolve the situation. Around age six or seven, however, children begin to accommodate others, and egocentric thought begins to give way to social pressure. These 'beginnings' may be evident in this study where, for example, seven year old Caren suggested that the Picasso was not a good thing to paint about "because it makes the other person who is looking at it cry or sad". Furthermore, it must also be noted that egocentrism of thought is not only applicable to the preoperational child but is, although differing in extent, a continuous part of cognitive development (Wadsworth, 1989, p. 70).

Egocentricity of response was also evident in reasons given by most children for liking an aspect about a painting. For example, where the subject matter or colour of a painting appealed to a child, responses such as "because *I* like it", or "it's *my favourite* colour" tended to support the notion of these children taking an egocentric view. In reference to favourites, Parsons (1987, p. 30) explained that this idea expresses the essential feature of egocentrism in young children, that is "the lack of distinction between the perception of self and others". The frequent references to favourites which was evident in this study was also documented by Stokrocki (1984) and Parsons et al., (1978).

Furthermore, the aspect of egocentricity also relates to the previously stated issue of the young child's level of cognitive development. As a result, it does appear that the aesthetic responses made by young children are influenced by their levels of cognitive perception.

### 5.3.2 Free Association

With reference to subject matter, the children would often discuss what was represented by freely associating other images with what they saw. For example, John's description of the Picasso was voiced as something "from Star Wars", and Rachel's description was of a lady holding a "fish" rather than a purse in Renoir's painting of the "Apple Vendor". If the children had problems describing or identifying what they saw they would often invent a situation or subject. For example, the Picasso was associated with a variety of possibilities, including a "witch" or "a man walking to a party". Parsons (1987, p. 31) explained that if children are unable to recognise what a painting is about, then they read their own subject into it, guessing or inventing.

Another result of this free association with subject matter is connected with the meaning or understandings that young children place on what is depicted. According to Parsons (1987, p. 31) because young children have little grasp of the idea of pictorial representation they feel free to choose what the painting is about, depending on what they are thinking about. This statement is more applicable to several of the younger children included in this study (e.g. five year old John and Rachel) and also provides an explanation of the behaviour displayed by six year old Shane which is illustrated as a defining feature of his discussion of the Picasso (see Chapter 5, p. 83). Parsons suggests that at this age children are not



perturbed by the failure of others to see what they are thinking about, nor do the children feel a need to be consistent over time. This suggestion is in keeping with Shane's inconsistency in determining whether the subject matter of the Picasso was male or female and also provides links with the egocentric perspective apparently displayed by young children.

As attention moved to the various parts of the paintings, whether they were items of subject matter or colour, several children also displayed the tendency to shift from associated memory, back to the painting. Thus Rachel, who turned the discussion of the dog in the Renoir to the fact that "we used to have two dogs but now we've got a Golden Retriever", not only associated freely with the subject matter but also linked it to personal experience and memories. It appears that salient parts of the painting, such as familiar subject matter, prompted children like Rachel to make these shifts from associated memory and the painting depicted.

### 5.3.3 Impulsive and Reflective Responses

Besides associating freely with the subject matter, the children would also describe what they saw in a piecemeal way, without relating specific parts to each other or viewing the painting as a whole. This is particularly evident with the Renoir where the children would describe the situation in a serial manner, naming each item and object as separate parts. However, a description of the painting as a whole was often given when the children were specifically asked to describe what the *overall* situation of the painting was depicting. For example, the Renoir was "a picnic" or "a woman selling apples". Such responses are in keeping with recent reports of young children's perception and understanding. Wood (1988) outlined factors

which different theorists believe influence and promote children's thinking and understanding. He claims that young children tend to be unable to synthesize objects into a larger configuration. When individual elements are meaningful they draw a child's attention to them. Wood does not suggest that young children cannot see "the whole". Rather, they are unable to attend to or perceive both the parts and the whole at the same time. With questioning and discussion both dimensions can be considered.

#### **5.3.4 Sense of Pleasure**

As children respond to paintings, Parsons (1987) argues that they display a strong sense of pleasure and enjoyment in what they see. However, he also indicated that young children do not complain if the paintings are not drawn well or the subject matter is ugly or repulsive. These statements, which are applied to younger children such as five and six year olds, do not correlate with the responses given by the K-1 children used in this study. For example, five year old Sandra was concerned with the way the hands of the Picasso were painted, and therefore suggested that the artist should change it to make "hands that are tiny". Furthermore, six year old Justin was perturbed with the Picasso labelling it a "crazy thing" which should be changed to show a face which was "nice and bright". Thus, these children did display a reaction to the negative or apparently inaccurate portrayal of subject matter such as pictured in the Picasso.

#### **5.3.5 Metaphorical Descriptions**

Although language development is an issue which appears in the literature dealing with young children's aesthetic responses, the use of metaphorical descriptions

tends to compensate for the young child's potential lack of appropriate vocabulary. Thus, another feature of several of the children's responses in this study was the use of metaphorical language to aid in describing a situation, colour or feeling. These descriptions display an inventiveness in the child's attempt to bring across meaning or to express intangible ideas. For example, as illustrated in results presented above, five year old Rachel likened the "good feelings" contained within the Renoir to a kitten or a dog or a giraffe". Likewise, six year old Ellen explained that the colours of the Picasso made her feel "happy" because they were "like the rainbow and the gold", therefore expressing the appeal of the colours' brightness and boldness. These examples may also give support to Stokrocki's (1984) suggestion that due to their lack of appropriate vocabulary, children develop metaphorical descriptions for things they see. Furthermore, the use of metaphorical descriptions could be linked to the preoperational child's level of cognitive development (Wadsworth, 1989).

### 5.3.6 Moral and Aesthetic Considerations

As illustrated in the results, a final characteristic which emerged from several of the children's responses was the tendency to confuse moral and aesthetic considerations when determining the value of a painting. For example, the response made by five year old John was noted earlier as he considered the Renoir to be a good painting "because you could grow". Parsons (1987, p. 36) indicates that this problem of distinguishing between aesthetic and moral considerations is a progressive sorting out problem which is an important aspect of cognitive development and which becomes more complex as an individual develops. It should be noted, however, that drawing conclusions from such

comments is not possible as further investigation of the meaning attributed by the child to the scene would be necessary.

In summary, this discussion has presented some of the underlying features of the children's responses with a particular focus placed on the nature of these responses. The six salient characteristics of the children's responses have been presented and supported by the documented literature and illustrated with examples.

#### 5.4 QUESTION THREE AND FOUR

*Upon which attributes of two given reproductions of artwork do young children place value?*

*To what extent can young children offer reasons for their preferences in this regard?*

The third and fourth research questions presented in this study dealt specifically with the preferences children had for the two painting reproductions. In particular, these questions sought to examine the attributes within the paintings on which the children placed value and the reasons given for these preferences.

Based on responses to questions which focused on 'judgement', indication was given of the painting which the children considered "good" as well as the one they preferred the most. Although the Renoir proved to be the more popular of the two, the Picasso was also preferred by several of the older children, notably in the year two and three levels. Essentially, the reasons given for their choice of preference centred around the appeal of colour, subject matter or the overall physical appearance of the painting. These preferences were also manifested in the children's responses to the other topics of discussion.

##### 5.4.1 Colour

The appeal of colours is discussed by Parsons (1987, p. 28) who explains that children find them "intrinsically attractive" and they are thus enjoyed "for their own sake". Reasons offered by the children for liking a particular painting also reflected Parsons' statement that the more colours a painting has the better it is. Evidence of this, for example, is given in six year old Shane's reason for preferring

the Picasso "because its got more colours". Furthermore, colours that are bold, bright and plentiful are described by Parsons as holding the most appeal. Therefore, phrases such as "nice colours" or "more colourful" illustrate the influence of colour as the reason offered for preferring a particular painting. This preference for colour also illustrated the fact that although the sad subject matter of the Picasso may not have been liked by several children, the bright and bold colours justified its overall appearance.

#### 5.4.2 Subject Matter

The second major area which provided indications of preference was the subject matter or physical appearance of the paintings. The two defining features about subject matter which were also evident in this study are discussed by Parsons (1987) as the beauty and realism of representation.

##### Beauty

This beauty of subject matter is illustrated in six year old Ellen's response to preferring the subject matter of the Renoir "because they've got nice faces and happy smiling faces". According to Parsons (1987, p. 40), a subject is beautiful if it is "good of it's kind". Thus, the terms "nice faces" indicates the quality of 'goodness' seen in the Renoir's subject matter. Furthermore, preferences for beauty were also displayed in changes which were suggested for the Picasso. For example, suggestions for changing the face of the woman to one which was "bright", "nice", "better" or "happy" were given. Parsons suggests that this idea of beauty

is built up through a sense of the presence of others with whom likings are shared (1987, p. 44).

### **Realism**

Linking back to the defining features of the responses made by eight year old Kevin and Nikky (see pages 86 and 87, Chapter 5), a strong preference for subject matter which mirrored reality was evident. Kevin explained his preferences for realism in terms of "expression" where you could "actually tell" what was occurring in the Renoir. Nikky, however, focused on the Picasso, as did many of the other children, indicating that changes needed to be made to the subject matter so that it would reflect reality. The responses made by the children indicates an inclination for a subject which has been given realistic and detailed treatment, for example, 'skin' and 'hair' that was the correct colour. What the Picasso appeared to lack came directly from the children's knowledge of the subject and not from a sense of form or style (Parsons, 1987, p. 47). For example, the face of the Picasso lacked correct skin and hair colours, not because the painting needed them for formal or stylistic reasons, but because those colours exist in real faces. Realism therefore can be regarded as a set of formal demands.

The two types of realism, namely schematic and photographic, discussed by Parsons are also represented in this study. For example, eight year old Tim explains that the Picasso "puzzles" him because the "fingernail" of the woman is in the incorrect position. In this instance, schematic realism is being referred to, where a painting represents what we know about the

subject, and where the selection of features such as body parts are placed in appropriate relationships, representing an object. However, a preference for photographic realism also occurred, where the assumption was made that the purpose of a painting is to represent accurately how things look, rather than how they are. For example, five year old Sandra criticized the appearance of the hands in the Picasso for not conforming to the criteria of photographic realism. She suggested, therefore, that they should be changed to "tiny hands" which reflect reality.

At this point it should also be noted that the findings generated from this study dispute Machotka's (1969) earlier statements that a preference for realism begins to occur only around eight years of age. Rather, the responses of children such as five year old John (see Table 2) tend to be more in line with the findings of Coffey (1969) who also established that a preference for realism existed at the kindergarten level.

## **5.5 ISSUES AFFECTING NATURE OF RESPONSE**

### **5.5.1 Previous Experience and Exposure**

The issue of previous experience and exposure appeared most significant when considering the responses made by eight year old Kevin and Tim and which were highlighted as the defining features when summarizing their responses (see page 6, Chapter 5). The apparent influence of exposure to art related discussion seemed to be manifested in Kevin's use of the term "expression" to describe the appearance of the two paintings. This term shows possible links to previous verbal exchanges about artworks either within the formal classroom environment



or in another environment such as the home. Likewise, Tim's reference to artworks found in "encyclopedias" and which ultimately helped mould his opinion of a "good" artwork, also illustrated the effects of previous exposure to artworks and art related discussions. The influence of informal and formal educational processes discussed by Bourdieu (in Rosario and Collazo, 1981) was presented earlier in this study (see page 16 and 17, Chapter 2) and the responses made by these two children appear to reflect the social nature of aesthetic perception.

The presence of an art specialist within the school may have been a variable which stimulated or influenced the responses made by these two children although it is acknowledged that all children in the sample have had contact with the art specialist. Whatever the situation, the influence of previous experience or exposure appears to have an effect on the responses given by children. In this study however, the background of each case was not profiled in depth and therefore it was difficult to determine what previous experiences the children may have had.

### 5.5.2 The Nature of the Study

Finally, the nature of the data collection procedure and subsequent analysis of results has its own influence on the outcomes of any study. In the present study the children were required to respond to several questions organized under the topics of subject matter, feelings, colour, the artist's properties and judgement. From these questions came the children's responses and specifically the characteristics of their perceptions and preferences. As a result, the questions used in the research instrument ensured that certain characteristics would be stimulated or would arise during the discussion. For example, the topic 'colour'

illustrated the preferences young children have for bright, bold and beautiful colours. The reason for employing this questioning procedure was namely because these topics, as described by Parsons (1987,p. 14), capture reasonably well most of the concerns expressed by people when they talk about paintings.

## 5.6 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter presented the results of this study. The characteristics of the children's responses were considered in light of the four research questions. From this discussion, the primary characteristics displayed by the children included a relishing of bright and plentiful colours and a free wheeling associative response to subject matter. Aesthetically the paintings provided a stimulus to pleasant, personal associations and memories, with the kindergarten subjects indicating a strong egocentricity of response. The paintings were also judged to be better if the subject matter depicted was attractive and colourful and if the representation was realistic rather than the converse. Feelings contained within the paintings were described in concrete behavioural terms and attributed more to the subject matter represented rather than to the painting as a whole. Finally, the skill, patience and care taken by the artist was considered as indicative of the difficulty of the painting's construction.

As part of this discussion, issues affecting the responses made by young children were also presented in light of the results obtained. These included the issues of cognitive and language development and the influences of previous experience and exposure to artworks and related discussions. From these results, the following chapter describes the implications which have been drawn and offers suggestions for further research.

**6.0 CHAPTER OVERVIEW**

## 6.0 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

From the results discussed in the previous chapter, several implications have arisen regarding the aesthetic response abilities of young children. Besides verifying the ability of young children to respond aesthetically, this discussion also presents several recommendations for art educators and early childhood curriculum developers. These recommendations include the structuring of specific aesthetic programmes which may extend and enhance the young child's aesthetic sensitivities. As a conclusion to this chapter, suggestions have been made regarding avenues of further research into the response capabilities that young children possess.

### 6.1 IMPLICATIONS

The primary focus of this study was to determine the capabilities of young children in making aesthetic responses and the reactions and views expressed by the children have endorsed the capabilities of these children in making such responses. It was noted in the list of definitions that aesthetics, in this study, was defined as "talk about" an artwork and incorporated both the children's perceptions and value judgements about the construction and appearance of an artwork. Thus, through the discussion preceding this chapter it was possible to note that young children are capable of responding aesthetically to visual artworks and that they have certain perceptions and preferences regarding painting reproductions.

As a further result, the findings of this study also emphasize Taunton and Colbert (1984), Bowker and Sawyers (1988), Feldman (1970) and Chapman's (1978) earlier

assertions that young children can respond to and state preferences for particular artworks as well as supporting these with simple personal judgemental criteria. In addition, these findings refute the propositions put forward by several art specialists and documented by Feeney and Moravcik (1987), that young children are not able to make judgements and are therefore not capable of aesthetic responses of any kind.

Besides providing confirmation of the general ability of young children to respond aesthetically, this study also presented the various characteristics of children's perceptions and preferences for visual artworks. For example, the young child's preference for colour and the appeal of subject matter were two major characteristics noted. In this sense, these results reiterated the findings of several other aesthetic response researchers, notably Coffey (1969), Taunton (1978), Parsons, Johnston and Durham (1978), Rosentiel, Morison, Silverman and Gardner (1978), Stokrocki (1984) and Parsons (1987).

From the responses made by the children, the value of encouraging young children to participate in aesthetic response activities is given support. Although the children may have shared general characteristics in their perceptions and preferences, this study also illustrated some of the imaginative and creative thinking that is possible as the children discussed what they saw in the paintings. The metaphoric descriptions employed by the children perhaps exemplify this. Although it is quite possible that young children could make finer discriminations, they may be hampered by a relatively limited vocabulary for discussing aesthetic topics and thus use these metaphoric descriptions. Furthermore, it should be realised that even though, in substance, the responses of young children may be

unlike those of adults, they are still capable of responding to and discussing visual artworks.

The possibility of broadening children's understandings of artworks and their compositions is also suggested through some of the responses given in this study. Given that young children have the ability to verbalize their perceptions, early childhood educators have a potentially powerful avenue to pursue when producing programmes which encourage aesthetic sensitivity. While this study has not provided concrete evidence of the *actual* value of an early childhood programme focused on aesthetic sensitivity, it has produced data which suggests that such a programme has the potential to advance children's thinking about objects around them. The value of aesthetic programmes is primarily focused on the benefits they may provide in producing students who can perceive, analyze, judge and value the things they see, hear and touch in their environment (Montgomery, in Haskell, 1979). This idea is also echoed by Schwartz (in Lenton, Darby, Miller and Herman, 1986, p. 112) who claims that the aesthetically educated individual is also more accepting of others and is capable of greater enjoyment, because art has pointed out to him that variability is enrichment, not threat.

The questioning procedure used in this study also has implications for art programmes constructed for the early childhood classroom. The types of questions asked in this study appeared to be effective in encouraging verbal responses from the children. Furthermore, the questions enabled the children to focus on specific elements within the painting reproductions. Creative and individual responses emerged from the questions and they also helped to illustrate the different levels of thinking the children were required to use (for example, projecting their thoughts about feelings held by individuals other than

themselves.). The organization of the questions by focusing on topics most likely to elicit a response from the children proved supportive to children expressing their ideas about artworks. These topics may also be applied to similar subjects and materials for classroom experiences.

## 6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the findings of this study, the development of aesthetic sensitivity in young children through a planned programme may prove beneficial. Any medium which prompts the thinking and feeling of a child about the world may assist in creative and mental growth. Baskin and Harris (1982, p. 11) emphasize this point of view by expressing the need for deliberate opportunities that can be created in which children are sensitized to visual stimuli and are helped to process their responses. The early years of childhood appear to be the optimal time to lay the foundation for a lifetime of enjoyment of the arts. Therefore, the early childhood teacher has a significant role to play in providing these experiences.

Teachers, however, need to be sensitive to the arts and skilled in conveying this sensitivity to children if they are to be successful in developing the aesthetic capabilities of young children. As indicated by Evans (1987, p. 98) teachers skilled in designing an aesthetic learning environment, using real artworks for children's sensory discrimination, co-ordinating home and school experiences, and encouraging children's aesthetic expressiveness are critical to the success of aesthetic education. Sharp (1976, p. 28) argues that a means of preparing the teachers of young children so that they may respond and help children respond to aesthetic qualities found in works of art is fundamental to developing the aesthetic sensitivities of children. Primarily, for aesthetic development to occur, children

need experiences with beautiful and stimulating environments within the school and outside of it, exposure to fine art, and opportunities to discuss art and beauty with thoughtful and guided adults. Programmes which support teachers in such areas as effectively questioning children and encouraging meaningful dialogue, require construction so that aesthetic sensitivity in young children can be stimulated and enhanced.

In this sense, a programme designed for the early childhood years requires careful planning particularly as aesthetic educators consider the aesthetic experience as unique and potentially rewarding to society. Given that children as young as five years of age are capable of responding aesthetically, a programme should be initiated that has its roots at the kindergarten level. Thus, according to Madeja (in Lenton et al, 1986, p. 119) the sequence of aesthetic education programmes should commence with five or six year old children becoming aware of aesthetics in the immediate physical world in which they live. More specifically, experiences at this level may include whole class response to visual artworks such as painting reproductions or learning centres designed to present and encourage exploration of an artwork. Furthermore, museum or gallery visits, as described by Stokrocki (1984) and by Feeney and Moravcik (1987), are also a valuable experience at this early age, particularly if they involve hands-on and concrete experience of the artworks displayed.

Besides responding to artworks, further sources of content for an aesthetic education programme designed to enhance and encourage the young child's aesthetic response ability are summed up in a statement by Madeja and Onuska (in Lenton et al., 1986, p. 116). They argue that although the arts (including music and dance) embody aesthetic content and provide some of the most



appropriate examples for studying and experiencing aesthetic qualities, these qualities actually exist in all phenomena and thus aesthetic education will help students to perceive these qualities whether they are present in art or nature.

Continuity in programme planning and provision of experiences is a necessary feature if the development of aesthetic response ability is to proceed from the kindergarten to the junior primary grades. Programmes should therefore be initiated so that they can be followed up, enhanced, and extended as the children move through the school. Experiences presented in the kindergarten such as whole group exploration of a visual artwork can be extended and deepened in the primary school grades. An increasing complexity of experiences would allow for and support changes in the children's levels of cognitive development and responding abilities.

As indicated, the ability and skill of the teacher in presenting these experiences is critical if these programmes are to prove effective. In more specific terms teachers need to pay close attention to the dialogue they create when responding to young children. Meaningful exchanges are enabled when the teacher has an awareness of the young child's world and early beginnings (Kanter, in Hoffman and Lamme, 1989). This not only involves careful planning and skilful questioning, but also a genuine interest in the children's responses to visual artworks. By providing experiences which allow for these features, the teacher can guide a child's initial discriminations and subsequent responses.

Aesthetic programmes which involve classroom questioning would allow children to learn the ways of responding to the arts by looking at and talking about art with others. Taunton and Colbert (1984, p. 62) also state that teachers would do

well to model verbal responses to artworks using rich and varied descriptive and metaphoric language. Such language can illustrate the non-literal and expressive nature of art, while also showing how language can be used to discover and share expressive meaning.

### 6.3 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The findings of this study have further consolidated the previously documented presence of aesthetic response abilities in young children. Avenues for further research have emerged from several of the issues which arose as part of this project. In particular, the area of language ability requires further exploration to determine the possibilities for encouraging aesthetic sensitivity. For example, a specific focus might be directed at how the language used by young children affects their verbalization of aesthetic perceptions. This type of research would inevitably involve a greater in-depth study of the metaphorical descriptions used by children to describe their perceptions and the extent to which these descriptions are determined by cognitive development. Furthermore, future studies may refine the descriptions of young children's aesthetic response capabilities by capturing children's responses through other than verbal means. For example, the possibility of linking children's own pictorial representation with their descriptions of artworks and reactions to particular stimuli may be a productive line of inquiry.

The effect of exposure and experience to artworks and art related discussions is another area which would provide a sound arena for further research. In particular, how social institutions such as the school or family contribute to the acquisition of aesthetic meaning through formal and informal educational

processes, is a potentially rich area for study. Evaluation studies of programmes aimed at enhancing aesthetic sensitivity and response also have the potential of targeting specific variables which advance children's aesthetic responses. Furthermore, comparative research which would consider the effects of the presence or absence of an art specialist within the classroom environment may be fruitful grounds for exploring the issue of exposure.

A final suggestion for further research studies involves analysing young children's responses to different forms of visual artworks such as sculpture and three dimensional artworks. These studies may be directed at determining the types of responses made by children to these differing visual art forms and whether they elicit similar or different aesthetic responses to those made to painting reproductions. A closer look at children's responses to abstract forms or modern art is a further possibility for determining characteristics of young children's aesthetic responses. From these studies, indications of the benefits of responding to various forms of visual stimuli may be provided.

#### 6.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter has provided a discussion of the implications which arose as part of the study. From this discussion the ability of young children to respond aesthetically to artworks was given support. This ability to respond aesthetically endorses the value of encouraging young children to participate in aesthetic response activities. Thus, recommendations for classroom teachers and art educators include the provision of aesthetic programmes which begin at the K-level and continue through the primary school years. Teachers themselves may benefit from exposure to a wide variety of artistic material. Furthermore, they

need to consider the types of experiences they present and the manner in which they are presented. The questions asked in this study appeared to be effective for generating discussion about artworks. In this sense, they may exemplify types of questions which could be used within the classroom when discussing artworks.

Suggestions for further research centred around the language ability of young children when responding to artworks, as well as the effect of previous experience and exposure to artworks through formal or informal educational processes. Subsequent studies could also involve investigating children's responses to other art mediums and the types of responses these artforms encourage in comparison to paintings.

## CONCLUSION

Focusing on the aesthetic responses of young children as a means of enhancing and deepening understandings of the way children think and learn may prove instructive. Attention given to aesthetic responses, therefore, may have dual benefits. On the one hand, children may be assisted to see in new ways visual media around them, thereby deriving a deeper sense of pleasure with the world while on the other, adults involved with young children may learn more about the ways children see the world and about how they think and learn.

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**APPENDIX 1**

Jacqueline Kik  
[REDACTED]

6 July 1989

Dear Sir

I am writing this letter as a student currently enrolled at the Western Australian College of Advanced Education and completing my Bachelor of Education with Honours. As part of this course, and with the help of Dr. Norman Hyde, I am conducting a research project into the aesthetic art responses of young children. Based on recommendations from Murray Randell who indicated that your school was involved in an art programme, I wish to enquire as to the possibility of conducting a small scale research project within your school. In order to discuss this possibility with you it would be much appreciated if I could contact you by phone at the beginning of Third Term.

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline Kik

**APPENDIX 2**



P. A. RENOIR (1841-1919) - "LA VENDITRICE DI LATTE"  
CLEVELAND - "THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART" - LEONARD C. BIANCA JR. COLLECTION



**APPENDIX 3**



**APPENDIX 4**

**DRAFT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS USED IN THE PILOT STUDY****SEMBLANCE**

Is this the way you'd expect a painting of a \_\_\_\_\_ to be? (e.g. 'woman'.)

What do you think the artist could have done differently? OR How could the artist improve the paintings?

How can you tell a good painting from a bad painting? OR How can you tell if a painting is a good painting?

Is this a good thing to paint about? (e.g. a woman crying.)

**SUBJECT MATTER**

Is this a good thing to paint about? OR Is this the kind of thing you'd expect an artist to paint about?

What do you think artists/painters should paint about?

Is it good to paint about things that are sad or mean?

**FEELINGS**

What kind of feeling would you say is in this painting?

What feelings do you get when you look at this painting?

Is there more than one feeling in the painting? OR Is that the main feeling or is there others?

**COLOUR**

What do you think about the colours?

Do you like the colours? Why or why not?

Are these good colours? Why?

Are they happy/sad colours? Why?

What makes them good/bad colours?

**THE ARTIST'S PROPERTIES**

What does it take to paint a painting like this?

OR What do you think it took, on the part of the artist, to paint this picture?

What does an artist need?

Would this painting be hard to paint? Why?

Would the \_\_\_\_\_ be harder or easier to paint than \_\_\_\_\_? (State the particular painting.)

### **JUDGEMENT**

Do you think this is a good painting? Why or why not?

Which do you like the best of the two paintings? Why?

Would you say that you like this painting or you don't like this painting?

Would you say that this is a good painting or it is not a good painting? Why?

**APPENDIX 5**

**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS USED IN THE MAJOR STUDY****SEMBLANCE**

What do you see in this painting/picture? OR Tell me what this is a painting/picture of?

Is this the way you'd expect a painting of a \_\_\_\_\_ to be? (e.g. 'woman'.)

What do you think the person who made this painting could have done differently? OR Would you like to change anything in this picture/painting? What? Why?

How can you tell a good painting from a bad painting? OR How can you tell if a painting is a good painting?

Do you think this is a good picture/painting?

**SUBJECT MATTER**

Is this a good thing to paint about? (i.e. a woman crying.)

What kinds of things do you think people should paint about?

Is it good to paint about things that are sad or mean?



Have you ever painted a picture about \_\_\_\_\_? (i.e. a picnic.) What was it like?

### FEELINGS

What kind of feeling would you say is in this painting?

What feelings do you get when you look at this painting? OR How does this picture make you feel?

Are there any other feelings in the picture?

Do you think everyone would feel the same way about this picture as you do?

### COLOUR

How do the colours make you feel?

Do you like the colours? Why or why not?

Are they happy/sad colours? How can you tell?

What makes them good/bad colours?

If you painted this picture would you use the same colours?

**THE ARTIST'S PROPERTIES**

Do you think this would have been a hard painting for the artist to do?

Why/why not?

Which of these paintings do you think would have been easiest to do? How come?

What do artists have to be good at to make really good paintings?

Are you any good at drawing/painting? How can you tell?

**JUDGEMENT**

Do you think this is a good painting? Why or why not?

Which do you like the best of the two paintings? Why?

What are the things you look for to decide if a painting/picture is a good one?