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Christine Marme' Thompson

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mentor's introduction

Christine Marme' Thompson

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Masami Toku's interest in the distinctive qualities of Japanese children's drawings originated years ago in a seminar on children's artistic development taught by George Hardiman, now Professor Emeritus at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. In conjunction with her work in that course, professor Hardiman urged Ms. Toku to collect a number of works from the young student's she taught each weekend in a Japanese school in Chicago. When these renditions of playground activities drawn by Japanese children living, temporarily or permanently, in the United States were compared to interpretation of the same theme produced by a more heterogeneous group of American children, the contrast was dramatic. When participants in George's seminar attempted to categorize these drawings, using the 13 categories of spatial treatment generated by Eisner (1976), it soon became apparent that the drawings made by Masami's students were far more difficult to classify than any of the drawings produced by children in Chicago, Champaign-Urbana, small town or suburban Illinois. As we would predict, the content of the drawings reflected each child's preferences and circumstances, and some accommodation of space to topic. But Japanese children's drawings seems, in several respects, to defy predicted evolutionary patterns to which other children conformed, to a considerable degree, in their drawings.

In her dissertation-in-progress, Masami attempts to describe the particular ways that Japanese children depict space in solicited drawings, and to isolate some of the specific cultural influence which suggest different models for Japanese children to follow as they represent spatial relationships in their drawings. Her search has lead her back to Japan, where she collected 2,000 drawings from elementary school children in three cities in different parts of the country. She later interviews those children and attempted to ascertain their preferences for various forms of spatial treatment in drawings. As she has continued to pursue this study, her questions have become progressively deeper and more inclusive, moving from the descriptive to the interpretive, seeking not only to identify cultural differences but to locate their sources.