

What Can a Drawing Tell Us?

Adolescents' Self-Portraits and Their Inner World

We asked Grade 8 students from rural Canadian schools to draw themselves enjoying a leisure activity, and also to complete a set of self-report measures about their social and emotional experiences.

Purpose of the Study

To understand what adolescents' drawings can tell us about their social and emotional experiences



Measures

- **Perspective taking** is the ability to understand and consider the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of others
- **Empathic concern** is the ability to understand and recognize others' mental states, thoughts, and emotions, and the capacity to share or experience the emotions of others
- **Mindfulness** has two components: 1) intentional and non-judgmental present awareness of sensations, thoughts, and emotions, 2) and attitudes like loving-kindness, acceptance, curiosity, non-evaluation, and non-attachment

Main Findings

- Students who drew themselves from a **non-front view** (turned partly or fully away from the viewer) reported:
 - **higher perspective-taking**
 - **higher empathic concern**
- Students whose self-portraits showed **movement** and energy, like running, dancing, or playing, reported **higher dispositional mindfulness**
- Students who pushed their figure to the **margins of the page** reported **less mindfulness**

Implications

Creative, expressive methods like drawing give researchers and practitioners a different kind of access to adolescents' inner worlds.

Why is this Important

These findings will

- support the creation of social-emotional programming for youth
- inform decisions on institutional investments in art-based programs
- help guide future research to further understand children's drawings.