

Investigating the Position of Imaginary Companion (ICs) and its reflection in the Painting of Children in Age Group "B"

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Abstract

Painting fosters creativity while it is similarly one of the most effective ways to direct children's perceptions and feelings. Imaginary Companions, rooted in substantiating children's strong imagination, also play a decisive role in how a child deals with the world around her/him. Actualizing an imaginary companion by the child is also done instinctively, while adults analyze this as abstract which results in a research-oriented relation. Reflecting objective events in a childish visual language is a decisive reason for the semantic expression of the child's requests through the shapes and lines in her/his painting. The purpose of this study is to identify the position of imaginary companions and how they are reflected in the paintings of age group "B". Research questions include 1. Where are imaginary companions located in children's lives? 2. How are imaginary companions situated and reflected in the paintings of children in the age group "B"? This article was conducted by descriptive-analytical method and the required data was gathered by a documentary, library method and also by field method through dialogue with children and observation of works. The research population consists of five paintings by four children in the age group "B" in a selective manner. The results show that according to the concept of imagination, the tendency of children to paint is to revive the different positions of a different game; because in the process of playing and painting, they can experience contemplation on the order of objects and subjects.

Keywords: Imaginary companions, Children's Painting, Game, Imagination, Age Group "B"¹

Introduction

1 - Preoperational stage: ages 2 to 7

According to Piaget, children perceive reality through their personal experiences with the environment. That is, what the child thinks about reality is not the same as reality itself, but it is the child's perception of reality. Accordingly, children's fantasizing is such that they turn their imaginary world into the real world, and because a child looks at things without prejudice, such characteristics bring him/her closer to creativity. Fantasizing in children is common, and children in the age range of 3 to 5 years do not distinguish reality from fantasy. In their view, everything that comes to mind is real, and this gives rise to certain imaginations, including the phenomenon of imaginary companions. Research has shown that children make imaginary companions between the ages of two and six. (Singer et al., 1990: 89). This phenomenon may have different manifestations in different years of life, different cultures and nations. Also, making imaginary companions by the child is done instinctively, while adults analyze it as abstract which in fact finds a research-oriented relation. Reflecting objective events in a childish visual language is a decisive reason for the semantic expression of a child's requests through the shapes and lines in her/his painting. It should also be noted that imaginary companion emerges in the development of games by children and increases the child's ability to communicate with others. The only addressee of these mental motivations is herself, and in her painting, its incarnated form can be retrieved more objectively and tangibly. Rereading creative real factors in a child's mind is a complex process that helps him/her find his/her way along as scenes change, in such a way not to place himself/herself under the compulsion of visual and so-called logical behaviors and free himself/herself to realize his/her mental fantasies. The purpose of this study is to identify the role of imaginary companions in childhood and how it is reflected in the paintings of age group "B". This age group is the second stage, according to Piaget's theory of cognitive development; (Piaget, 1951). The beginning of this stage is from about two to seven years old. During this period, children think at a symbolic level, but still do not use cognitive operations. The child's thinking at this stage is pre-operational. This means that the child cannot use the logic of transformation, combining and separating ideas (McLeod, S. A. 2018). Accordingly, in this article, first, the relationship between retrieving and understanding the position of imaginary companions and their existential causes has been considered and then their position and role in the formation of children's visual and mental creativity have been examined. Finally, using a qualitative method, the works and the reflection of imaginary companions are analyzed. The results of this study apply to urban and rural communities as well as all situations in which the growth and development of human species are achieved.

Literature review

About imaginary companions, no accurate scientific research has been conducted in Iran that can be cited, and only a few review articles can be mentioned. These studies have provided solely content to illustrate the subject. But this issue has been studied by several researchers abroad, the most important of which is Marjorie Taylor, whose book *"Imaginary Companions and the Children Who Create Them"* can be referred. In this book, Taylor examines the causes of having imaginary companions and describes this phenomenon in children. He tried to address the concerns of parents in this regard by providing useful solutions. For example,

he believes that children usually express their feelings by attributing them to their imaginary companions. Taylor has presented the results of his research in several other articles including "Imaginary Companions: Pretending They Are Real but Knowing They Are Not" (2008), in which he tried to explain this phenomenon as a healthy and common phenomenon among children and finally concluded that, in dealing with their imaginary companions, children often realize the imaginary nature of these creatures and have a clear understanding of it. The next article is "The Characteristics and Correlates of Fantasy in School-age Children: Imaginary Companions, Impersonation, and Social Understanding" (2004). In this article, Taylor and his colleagues have examined 100 school-age children out of 150 preschoolers that were examined three years ago. Finally, they have concluded that school-age children continue to interact with imaginary companions and that imaginary characters still exist during their lives. Similarly, children who do not have imaginary companions are ranked lower in their ability to understand emotions. Another article is "Survey of Imaginary Companions in Children Living in Foster Care" (2017). In this study, Taylor and his colleagues examined the prevalence of imaginary companions and their quality among children in foster care and in children in normal situation. Finally, they concluded that such children have more imaginary companions than children in normal situation and that there is no significant difference between the descriptions they give of their imaginary companions. Even the descriptions by children living in foster care with a history of misconduct and ordinary children, share many similarities, and both groups of children described companions that were a positive source of entertainment, friendship, and social support.

Research method

In terms of purpose, this research is fundamental-theoretical and has been conducted using a descriptive-analytical method and based on content analysis. Collection of required information is through documentary, library and also field methods. Data collection tools include: IDs, computer scanning equipment, as well as talking to children and mothers and observing the works. The research population consists of five paintings by four children in the age group "B", which were drawn by children based on the subject suggested by imaginary companions and selected in a non-probabilistic way. The analysis of the paintings is also based on the method of qualitative case studies. Due to the nature of this research, it is not hypothesis-based.

1- Image and imagination in psychology

In a psychological definition of fantasy, it can be said that child's sensory experiences do not stop at the level of sensory perception; rather, it finds the ability to manifest and be represented in the mind in the absence of a sensory stimulus. Representation of sensory perception is called image. Imagination or mental imagery of the human mind is sometimes shown by the inadequate interpretation of mental imagery. Mental imagery is the mental representation of objects that are not felt by the sensory organs at that moment. (Sternberg, 2008: 456).

Imagination also includes the representation of all sensory perceptions, but most research in cognitive psychology on subjective imagery has focused on visual imagery. Imagination is also predominant in human childhood. The child, in various forms, with the help of his/her imagination, creates and lives in a world based on animism based on primitive processes, free from good and bad social judgments and possible and impossible. (Ahmadi, 2013: 42) In general, the imaginary world, with its very basic characteristics, plays a very important role in human creativity.

1-1 Play

Play for children is as vital and natural as breathing and it is a universal expression of children and can transcend differences in ethnicity, language, or any other aspects of culture. (Drewes, 89 2010: 40).

There is no generally accepted definition of play. Everyone interpret it differently, but in general, anything done without considering profit and loss and without force and coercion is called a play. (Samadi, 2010: 33)

Creative activity liberates man in such a way that there is nothing else in captivity and he/she will reach a stage where he/she can play. As Schiller puts it, Man is only fully human when he plays. (Jung: 1931) Erickson (1950) believes that "play is the function of the Ego and is done to coordinate physical and social processes with the individual" and considers it as the opposite point and antithesis of work. (Hughes, 1998)

1-2 The role of play in a child's life

Play in children's lives is a means to acquire life skills, develop creativity, develop imagination and create a positive mental image of the person. About its importance, it can be said that through play, a child can learn the rules and regulations and correct her/his behavioral inconsistencies. Using the fantasy of symbolic and imaginary play is a developmentally natural activity in children's play. (Drewes, 2010: 41) Jean Piaget believes that the most admirable and highest rules and social system can be seen in children's plays (Samadi, 2010: 35)

It is obvious that play affects the wishes that dominates children all the time. (Freud 2003: 35). Through symbolic play, children can reconstruct and understand important events and experiences. The pleasure of the play arises from the fact that the experiences reconstructed in this way can be changed according to the wishes and senses of the player. (Thomas and Silk, 2001: 80-81). Children turn whatever they do not find enjoyable into something that is recalled in their minds and they struggle with it. Through play, they get out of the experience of passivity and reach dynamism, and transfer whatever is unpleasant to them to real playmates and even imaginary companions or painting, thereby emptying their minds. In other words, the imaginary companion and its reflection in the painting provide a basis for the child's inner companionship and conversation with herself.

1-3 Imaginary Companions

Imaginary companion is a psychological and social phenomenon in which a friendship or interpersonal relationship takes place beyond the external reality inside imagination. Although they may sometimes seem very real to their creators, but most of them realize that their imaginary companions are not real (Taylor 28: 1999). An imaginary companion is a character who is sometimes entirely invisible; sometimes the companion takes the form of a stuffed animal or doll and is considered a real creature. It is noteworthy that generally 65% of children up to the age of 7 had imaginary companions at some point during their lives. (Taylor et al.: 2004). From the age of 20 months, children can attribute their thoughts and feelings to their tools and toys, and after this stage, an imaginary companion will usually enter the child's life. [...] By making an imaginary companion, they alleviate their loneliness; get rid of their fears and anxieties while increasing creativity (Sadeghian 2014: 40).

Arthur Jersfield believes that regardless of the obvious need every human being feel for a friend, imaginary companion gives the child the necessary courage and venture he may lack and the imaginary companion may be considered as a shield against disaster for the child. He believes that imaginary companion for children may have completely different personalities. Children's descriptions of imaginary companions often include companions who are disobedient, bossy, argumentative, and unpredictable. They come and go on their own schedule rather than according to the child's wishes, and they do not always want to play what the child wants to play. (Taylor et al.: 2008) It is interesting that these traits are exactly against the wishes and expectations of adults from a companion.

This phenomenon indicates that children are dealing with complex issues that they all face as soon as they begin to connect with the world around them. By choosing his/her imaginary companion, the child steps on his/her path of development with daunting challenges and in a strong imaginative and creative way (Gourian and kakaei, 2005: 40-41).

Children do not differentiate between imaginary companions and real friends, but they feel closer to their imaginary companions and share their secrets with these friends, and are more interested in them. Many children do not create imaginary companions to fill the void of a real friend. Research has shown that the creation of private speech, companionship, and interaction with imaginary companions has a positive effect on raising the level of children's social relationships in society. It also expands the child's level of personal expression. Similarly, retelling the speeches of an imaginary companion and pretending it to exist is considered as role playing of the child for those around him/her. (Davis et al: 2013)

1-4 Child Art

It is commonly stated in the definition of children's art that children's art is a kind of spontaneous visual expression of children and adolescents from almost five to fourteen years old, which is similar to naive art. Considering the scope of children's art, the perfection of emotion and expression is recognizable in it. In the twentieth century, along with the evaluation of instinctive motivations in the process of artistic creativity, attention has been paid to the obvious qualities of color and design in children's painting. (Pakbaz, 2016: 1661).

This term was first coined by John Ruskin and Herbert Spencer but was first clarified by Franz Cizek. But perhaps the most important theorist in the field of children's art is Georges-Henri Luquet, who revolutionized the teaching of art to children with his classification, which is of particular importance among other classifications. This classification includes five stages of evolution (Thomas and Silk, 2001: 38). According to the concept of realism, Luquet has tried to express the characteristics of children's painting style. According to him, the child is not so attached to the shape and does not use painting to paint; rather, his/her goal is to introduce and identify what is missing. (Ahmadvand 2008: 162). Luquet assumed that children's painting was based on a kind of internal mental model that Piaget called a "mental image" and that the child intended to produce a recognizable and realistic representation of the object (Thomas 2001: 38).

1-5 Painting as Play and Education

Various studies on children's painting so far have shown that children's painting is not meaningless or worthless. Rather, such activities have a great content value and can be studied from various artistic, clinical, and educational aspects. All children should be given the opportunity to paint in sufficient time and with personal interest by using appropriate tools and equipment. Of course, some children enjoy a higher potential or innate talent and in case the stage is set, the talent of these children will flourish (Ferraris, 1992). Painting can also be a means of diagnosing incompatibility and a potential creative factor that can also be used as an effective means of treatment (Ferraris, 1992). Examining a child's painting is not restricted only to mental development; from another viewpoint, it can unveil their emotional life. It is possible to recognize the emotional and psychological issues of children from among the meaningful lines and movements they draw. (Jamali et al.: 2014). Piaget's theory is significant in explaining play. In his view, painting is the thing between play and mental imagery (Thomas and Silk 2001: 79). Piaget's theory is that interactions with the environment take the form of assimilation and accommodation (adoption and organization). In the process of adoption, the developing child tries to understand the environment using existing cognitive structures and ideas. If the new experience is not assimilated through existing cognitive structures, those structures are accepted through the process of accommodation. Therefore adaptation involves accommodating new aspects of the environment and new information. Through symbolic play, children can reconstruct important events and experiences thus understand them (Thomas and Silk 2001: 76-77). This can be clearly seen in the child playing with her/his imaginary companion. According to Piaget, some children's paintings have this quality of play; that is, performed only for their own sake and provides opportunities for assimilation. Therefore, Piaget considers scribbling by very young children to be just a play. However, Piaget considers most of the paintings, unlike other forms of play, an attempt to represent the real world and believes that they have many aspects in common with the emergence of mental images (Thomas and Silk, 2001: 81).

1-6 The reflection of imaginary companions in children's paintings

Since painting is an arena for reflecting the artist's imagination and fantasies, in examining its history, we come across prominent painters such as Frieda Kahlo. She reflects fantasy in many of her works and does not forget its presence while drawing so that the dream of having an imaginary companion, a sedative confidant, never left her. In her diary, she explains the origins of this double self-portrait called "The Two Fridas" (Figure 1): "I must have been 6 years old when I experienced intensely an imaginary friendship with a little girl more or less the same age as me.[.....]. 'My imaginary friend' was always waiting for me. I do not remember her image or her color. But I do know that she laughed a lot. Without any sounds. [.....]. But from my voice she knew everything about me. When I returned to the window I entered through the same door drawn on the glass pane. When? For how long had I been with her? I do not know. It could have been a second or thousands of years"(Herrera, 2019: 34).



Figure1: The Two Fridas .(source Herrera, 2019:542).

Some of these invisible friends are regular sorts of girls and boys who act as good playmates. Children seem to have clear mental images of what these friends look like and how they behave. They have no difficulty drawing pictures of them and describing their personalities. For example, they might include details such as the imaginary companion being funny, making them laugh, and being a good companion. (Taylor et al.: 2008).

In this process, the child soon realizes that drawing and painting are a means of expression that conform to their thoughts and set them free in imagining, while at the same time fill them with great pleasure. In addition, painting allows a child to express his/her inner thoughts, in other words, their own 'self', the impressions of the mind, and the culture that surrounds them. (Ferraris 1992: 76-77).

Interpreting and analyzing children's paintings are of interest only to adults. When a child declares something through an image, he or she reveals many traces of his or her personality. What is important for him/her is to express the accumulated experiences that indicate his/her existence. Here we can mention two specific parts, which include the need to paint and the need to express accumulated experiences. Because the world of art, like the world of play, allows the child to renew and consolidate his/her memories and use his/her experiences to enable him/her to know and deepen his/her awareness of the truth.

Given that painting is much closer than words to the innate truth of the child, painting is a good place for an imaginary companion to appear. Imaginary friends usually emerge in the mental structure of the child. This means that visual arrangements based on the metaphysical presence of an imaginary companion under different titles have a non-objective emergence. The child refers to this directly or indirectly while explaining the whats and hows of representing his/her visual elements. For example, it appears in the form of a member of

his/her family or even in the form of a small line, an unfinished circle, and an animal that may not be very similar to an animal. The objective representation of an imaginary companion in a child's painting is usually a picture similar to the child himself/herself and she/he is even the same gender and a partner in his/her living space. This category is directly related to realistic representation in the child's daily life. (Arefnia 1996: 6)

Because imaginary companion has a name and seems real to children, they consider an identity for them. In this way, the child recognizes his imaginary companion. The image of this companion sometimes looks like the child himself; his/her twin sister or brother, a cartoon character or a creature that is not exactly known.

2_ Analysis of works

The collection of paintings analyzed in this section includes the works of children aged 7-8 years. At this stage, children have begun to draw with visual realism. In the first painting (Figure 2), the child (Niki) depicts a work entitled *Imaginary Child*. She is eight years old and is highly interested in her imaginary companion. Niki reminds others of the presence of her imaginary companion in all her daily activities. Imaginary companion was with Niki since an early age in such a way that she used to write letters to her friend and has also drawn various paintings with the theme of an imaginary companion. In this painting, a collection of human, natural, and living space elements can be seen. In drawing human elements, the child depicted herself and her imaginary companion in the same way. Regarding the assimilation of imaginary companion, it should be noted

that when a child draws a human figure, he/she, primarily, declares the form or the perception of his/her body and desires. In fact, there are certain relations between some of the lines drawn as human figure and the mental and physical characteristics of the child who drew it. For example, if the human figure is well proportioned, there is a high probability that the child is perfectly compatible. If, on the contrary, the human figure is drawn in a very small size or at the corner of the paper, it means that the child considers him worthless and inferior to others (Ahmadvand 2012: 148). According to this painting, we are facing a child who has a rich imagination. She has painted various organs of the human figure in a lively and happy state. In Niki's painting, her imaginary companion Adina is depicted. Adina's head and body are noticeably larger than hers, and this proves that the situation is favorable in favor of the imaginary companion. According to Machover, the head represents the center of personality and intellectual power and intelligence and the main factor in controlling internal pressures. Here, too, Adina's head is larger than Niki's. Maybe sometimes resorting to the imaginary companion in the dream world helps her to get away from the small and big fears of life. This is because some scholars believe that some children use the size to emphasize the subject in their paintings. Therefore, Adina's larger head means that the child pays more attention to the head. Because of the implied hints to the concepts in the head, children sometimes draw it



Figure 2: Niki and her imaginary companion, (source: authors).

larger to highlight meanings attributed to the top of the body. Also, as can be seen in the picture, they are holding hands. The zigzag lines between the child and her friend connects them between them to the nature. The use of hand in painting represents the development of Ego and social compatibility. Similarly, since in the psychology of color, blue implies concepts such as depth, calmness, autonomy, self-confidence, loneliness, and contemplation of the child's personality, in this Fig., there is a relatively dark blue flower below their hands, which may subconsciously be an indication of their deep friendship. It should be added that the embodiment of an imaginary companion in children's paintings shows the child's desire for reinforcement, that is, to strengthen his/her visual information through his/her attitude. Since seeing is an unmediated experience, using visual elements by the child to convey information is an attempt to show the truth in the mind through realism. This creates a perfect interaction between the image depicted by the child and the inner destiny, that is, the symbolization that Luquet applies. In this work, we are faced with relatively large eyes, because the eyes represent the world inside the painter and the expression of her being social. From Machover's point of view, because eyes possess beauty value, girls often draw bigger eyes.

Another type of painting to examine the child's personality and compatibility is the image that the child draws of himself/herself and his/her peers. These pictures often show a group of children playing. When a child draws these kinds of drawings, he/she subconsciously places his/her real situation with an imaginary companion or others in the group. In her work, she expresses aspects of nature such as flowers and clouds in a way that divides each one equally among them. The work's space is very clear and the composition of the image is symmetrical relatively. For example, the symmetry of the clouds above the heads of Niki and her friend and their connection through a rainbow is an example of assimilation according to the child's imaginary world. These elements generally imply the same relationship the child has with his or her imaginary friend.

The use and method of space division, arrangement of elements, static state of elements, colors used and facial expressions in this work show the child's relationship with her objective and imaginary space and how the child reacts to her mental environment. It is as if the child in this painting is in a perfectly good state of mind in relation to the idea of an imaginary companion and wants her wholeheartedly. In Figure 3, Aytak depicts a painting entitled an imaginary companion. This painting reflects the experience of playing the handy-dandy game in the child's imaginary world. This painting has once again been created in a simulation manner. As it can be seen, the imaginary companion is drawn in a space equal to the child which can indicate that it is worth as much as the child. Sometimes, the child values his/her friend by paying attention to the details of the clothes, choosing warm colors and visual arrangements, thus revealing his/her superior role. Like Niki, Aytak is the only child in the



Figure3:Aytak,Imaginary companion, (source: authors).

family. The presence of an imaginary companion in their life indicates that the child is playing with her imaginary companion in her lonely hours. According to the child, her imaginary friend is her best friend and she does not fight with her and takes care of her and plays with her alone. According to some of Aytak's paintings, the element of line in her works is insignificant and is based on gentleness, and expresses the delicacy of emotions and spirituality. On the other hand, it emphasizes the child's shyness. In interviews with the child's mother, she also referred to the child's shyness. In Figure 3, the assimilation method is applied visually and sometimes conceptually with symmetrical image proportions. Because the child's drawing of herself and her imaginary companion has a form on the one hand and content on the other. Frequently formal elements and content elements are intertwined. On the one side of the frame, the flower vase expresses a childlike friendship and freshness between them, and on the other side, the wall clock is reminiscent of a long time to be together. Similarly, the clock and the vase are conceptually related to each other. It has given the elements in the background a state of being paired. They play (handy-dandy) together in a safe and cozy place. In most of the paintings depicted by the children of the research population with the theme of imaginary companion, we see the presence of these companions during the game. Because painting in the second stage is the incarnated form of child's imaginary play and this stage can be considered as the objective representation of imaginary friend's mentality.

Children like to draw people before they can draw objects but do not draw these human figures in the same way as they see them, because they are not able to do so at all, but they draw them in the same way that they understand themselves, and this depends on the degree of mental and motor development (maturation). Thus, the concept that children develop from their body shape from the beginning will determine the human figure at any age. It is from here that scholars are able to infer a tool to assess intelligence (Corman, 1992: 16-17). As a result, by examining the drawings of children who have drawn a human figure, one can get information about the image that the child has of his/her body. In this case, it is possible to examine the various details of the organs that the child has paid more attention to or completely forgotten. In Aytak's painting, attention is paid to the body during the play. In this way, they are playing the handy-dandy game and the hand of the character that the child has called herself hides the object, and this is evidence of understanding the handy-dandy game and its relationship with body parts, because the child cleverly removes one hand which highlights its prominence in the game. New scholars have concluded that children often paint human figures. In the same way, studies using the "Draw-a-Person test (DAP)" have repeatedly reported that children prefer to draw pictures of the same gender as themselves. Preferring to draw the image of the same sex has been interpreted as child's assimilation with his/her gender (Thomas and Silk, 2001: 87). Depending on the subject, it may be that the child's choice of an imaginary companion of the same sex is in line with this theory. Drawing character assimilation paintings principally relies on one's own existential identity in another form. This way, children strengthen defense mechanism and achieve desired perfection in their own image or the image of their imaginary companion. In addition, the paintings representing human figure have emotional meanings and often show the security of the child's social compatibility, which can be seen in the works of Niki and Aytak.

In another drawing by the same child (Figure 4), the variety of composition, rhythm, the allocation of vertical and horizontal surfaces, and the richness of the forms are factors that the child has used in her painting, by realizing the excitement of playing with her imaginary companion. Two-third of the frame is dedicated to cold colors. The rhythms that are present in some parts of the frame by several nested ellipses seem to reflect the actual decoration in the space around the child. The composition of the painting, unlike her other painting, is in the



Figure4:Aytak, Imaginary companion, (source: authors).

category of asymmetric composition. Motifs that are similar to the human eye and are drawn in different colors vertically and horizontally in the space around the child are reminiscent of the space familiar to the child. It is as if the child has tried to make the familiarization that is related to the elements and environment she lives in. The structure of children's faces, the color, and the shape of their hair are the same. This is the best evidence of the child's assimilation with her imaginary companion. Although the child has depicted her friend close to her in terms of character but has attributed space privileges to her. This means that the imaginary companion is depicted in a larger size or with a clearer face. She is in a higher position during the play. Choosing a red dress for an imaginary companion despite the cold space around them and paying attention to the details of her dress adds to her significance. These factors attract the audience's attention to the imaginary companion at the first glance. According to these signs in this work, it can be concluded that the imaginary companion has a special attraction for the child; an attraction that results in valuating her in the painting. Understanding the difference in level and dynamics of the painting composition and its relationship with the game of tag shows the child's great enthusiasm for the game. The presence of a wall behind the imaginary companion has also strengthened her position. As Corman points out, according to Butier, painting, apart from showing intelligence and evolution level of children, indicates something else, which is a kind of projection of their special existence and the special existence of others, or in other words, the way they feel and express their own existence and the existence of others. Examining a child's paintings will inevitably lead us to the heart of the issues that come from their life history, and the situations in which they live. According to him, free painting is projection, meaning that the whole character here is looking for a way to express himself/herself, and especially the semi-conscious and unconscious elements are projected out due to the freedom of action of the child (Corman, 1992: 18).

In (Figure 5), the child (Elaheh) depicts an imaginary companion sitting next to her in a familiar place that reflects their security. This painting belongs to a year ago. Now eight years old, she states that the painting is for her childhood when she used to play with her imaginary companion and that she has now grown up and no longer needs their presence. It is not surprising that the child depicts her imaginary play and keeps it as a memory in her drawings because painting, play and humor belong to one behavioral group. These activities, along with exploration and experience, bring pleasure to the child. In most of these works, the child

assimilates with her imaginary companion, which similarly follows the principle of pleasure. By inventing an imaginary companion and reflecting it in her painting, the child achieves a situation in which the principle of pleasure is maximized for her. As the child grows up and develops, he/she gradually tends to follow the principle of reality. As the child states as well, this change formed in her as she got older. In this painting, the child and her friend are assimilated, only the color of their pants is different, and this is the only difference between the two characters. The child draws herself with her imaginary companion. It can be said that in her current situation, in terms of age and gender, she feels comfortable with her



Figure5:Elaheh, imaginary companion, (source: authors).

friend. The result is the desire to get closer and sit next to her imaginary companion. She depicted herself in the form of another person or her friend in the form of herself. This shows that she is assimilated with her imaginary companion. The visual elements in the frame include play equipment and a familiar bed on which the child rests. The image of the clock on the right side of the frame, which rises from the child's subconscious, somehow shows the pleasant passage of time while playing with her imaginary companion. Oliverio Ferraris believes that children usually put other things in their paintings next to the human figure, including toys, etc., which turn the unknown



human figure into a familiar character for them. This shows their maturity. Mostly, girls reach this stage of development more and sooner than boys which

Figure 6: Faezeh, imaginary companion, (source: authors).

shows early emotional maturity in girls (Ferraris 1992: 36). The train is a moving visual element in her painting. Maybe she has a desire for an imaginary trip with her friend in her mind and depicts it that way. She likes to travel long distances with her doll and her beloved friend. Using these familiar elements, the child connects her imaginary world with the world around her. Because children connect the world around with the objects and issues around them using their own patterns, and this connection causes the recognition of phenomena around them. This causes the growth of creativity in children (Mehradsfar 2014:44). Through sensory perception, the child depicts the clock and the train in golden points of the frame. This issue can subconsciously connect these two visual elements (place and time). As mentioned before, there is nothing in her room other than her bed and toys. It is as if the child has considered all other items in the room as distractor and removed them from her painting deliberately so that the mind and the eye can relate to each other to touch and feel the imaginary companion. The abstract position of the bed adds to the importance and visual attraction of the painting and refers to its dreaminess. The removal of distractors in the image can well reflect the fluid mentality of the child and give a double richness to the structure of her work. The vacant space indicates the suspension of elements in the painting space. It is as if the visual elements have been installed somewhere in the vacant space of the frame or are suspended in the air. In Figure 6, which belongs to a child named Faezeh, the subject of the painting is taken from the experience of playing in the child's imaginary world. Her imaginary companion is different from the other paintings analyzed in this article. This child's imaginary companion has an angelic existence. Given the relative cognition that has been gained of this child in the school environment, she is an intelligent child. She grows up in a religious family and higher social class than her classmates. Her father is a priest, so the child witnessed books and religious beliefs at home. The drawing of an imaginary companion in the form of an angel is affected by the religious teachings of her family. According to the child, in this work, the child and her companion run together to play a game. Of course, the same act of running from a different perspective indicates the child following her imaginary companion; like following the presence of an imaginary companion in her life. The imaginary companion depicted as an angel is located in the composition sections in warm colors. From a

psychological point of view, red color expresses emotion, so the child attaches mental importance to this creature and accordingly, the imaginary companion finds a special visual value. In this painting, the child depicts a library in a large part of the frame and points out the importance of this spatial element with painting it colorfully. In addition, choosing the right side of the painting for the door is conceptually an emphasis on entrance and exit, which is also in the same path with the movement of the figures. Using red in the lower one-third of the frame (horizontal side of the frame) due to the weight it creates attracts the viewer's attention to the important place in the image. The pink carpet under the feet of the child and her imaginary companion emphasizes the location of the characters. Active dynamism fills the space of the frame by their playful movement. The inner and innocent vitality of the child in connection with the spatial approaches of the imaginary companion establishes a continuous flow between the form and the content of the painting.

After the age of six, one way the child uses to express movement in painting is to show the image in side view. According to Prod Hommeou's study, after the age of five or six, while exploring external reality more and more, she/he uses more side view to show the movement in her/his paintings to better show the dynamics of the images (Ferraris 1992: 40). Therefore, in this painting, it seems that the child has depicted her characters in side view to induce movement to the audience. When a child uses side view mode in a painting, he or she draws shapes that are irrational, regardless of perspective. Because some of the limbs are displayed from the front view, disproportionate and funny shapes are created in her painting. The child's perception of side view image is gradual as the limbs change and move and she later uses the same method to show the whole body (Ferraris 1992: 41-42).

In this painting, the chin, nose, and ears are removed in both characters; because this factor indicates that the child has seen her personalities completely and has drawn the image of herself and her imaginary companion from cap-a-pie, regardless of the details of the face. As the child grows older, he or she will be able to understand the portrait or face. In this painting, the position of the pupil of the eye refers to the side view of the face. The pupil of the eye has received more attention than the nose; even eyelashes have received more attention than the represented ears. As compared with peers, the way Faezeh treats indicates her elevated visual abilities. Anyway, a view from a different angle shows the expression of the child's creative mind. According to Weahner's theory, a child who depicts moving images in her paintings is usually more intelligent, active, and social than her/his peers.

3- Conclusion

Children's painting at different stages of its development, which is an experimental and evolved process from scribbling to meaningful lines and surfaces, is dreamlike. According to the theoretical foundations of the research and the analysis of the paintings of the research population, the results show that children, with dreamy approaches, determine the boundaries of the infinite realm of their minds and avoid anything else. Their minds look like a mirror that reflect honestly the content of anything, and that is exactly why painting is one of the most important and challenging ways to nurture children's minds, which ultimately leads to the development of children's mental creativity. In answer to the first question, it can be said:

Imaginary companions are among the most exciting approaches of a child's subjectivism, especially in his/her plays. Because children encounter new experiences in their life, such as social and scientific education, they develop imaginary companions in their minds to deal with anxiety caused by everyday events. Children choose imaginary companions along with their mental and spiritual development and sometimes accompany them up to adulthood. Also, in response to the second question of the research, it can be acknowledged that in the first stage, imaginary companions are formed in the process of children's play in a cause-and-effect relationship. The child then chooses the painting as a suitable background to reflect imaginary companions with whom they identify. For example, in studying the paintings of the research population, it was found that each child used their special methods to value an imaginary companion during the play. For example, Niki by depicting her imaginary companion in a larger size and assimilated with herself, Elaheh and Aytak with assimilation and Faezeh by dealing with imaginary creatures such as angelic beings have valued their imaginary companions. Sometimes this valuation is done by drawing animals. Children complete their mental and physical development with their imaginary companions. In this way, they strengthen their surrealist mentalities. At this stage, children include their imaginary companions in the form of creative plays and assimilated drawings and give them a very real place. Because in many cases it is the imaginary companion who protects them from their loneliness and fears.

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