

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Art is an expression of children's inner reality and provides a window through which their thoughts, feelings, behaviour and relationships can be translated into concrete images. Many early psychologists had hypothesized that children's drawings provide a *window* not only into their feelings but also their thoughts. As such, each picture, be it a scribble in haste or meticulously traced, is a statement of children's internal knowledge as coloured by their emotional state and associations. In this way, children's personalities, their perceptions of self in relation to others, their group values and attitudes can be analyzed through the interpretation of their artwork.

According to Klepsch and Logie,

Drawing speaks louder than words in the early stages of a child's development. It is therefore ideally suited as a technique for uncovering information about the inner self.
(1982, p.8)

Art is a nonintrusive, indirect approach of the drawing experience which enables children to express and indicate their feelings and experiences when verbal and writing skills are

lacking. Many children prefer to draw than talk and they draw what interests them and whatever is important to them at the time. Drawings can also be a means for children to express frightening and threatening events in their lives and for adults to understand their feelings and thoughts. Hence, drawings can play a unique role in identifying the status of children's development and feelings, especially those of shy children, of children with limited language and of children who are afraid to verbalize their fears.

It is widely held that art is an expression of emotions and ideas. Many psychologists have believed that everyone, trained in art or not, may express something of their emotional state when asked to draw a picture. Schildkrout, Shenker and Sonnenblick (1972) believed that when children draw an object they project their experiences onto the drawing surface and so drawings can express emotion through both motoric and visual representations of experience. Studies have shown that drawings by children with emotional problems differ from the productions by healthier children.

Koppitz (1968) found that human figure drawings by disturbed children had significantly more indicators of emotional discord such as tiny fingers, big hands and omission of the mouth than the drawings by well-adjusted children. She also listed the depiction of genitals as significantly associated with aggressiveness and more frequent among children with emotional problems. Yates, Beutler and Crago (1985) also observed substantial

differences in the drawings between children with emotional problems and those who were healthy and happy. They stated that the human figure drawings by disturbed children had "significantly more indicators of emotional discord, such as lack of arms, absence of facial features and omission of the mouth" (p. 184). Waterman, Erhardt, Kelly, McCord and Olveri (1988) found that abused children exhibited significantly more emotional indicators in their drawings than a matched group of non-abused children. Research by Lisosky (1992) indicated that homeless children of preschool age coped with their environment by expressing their anger through drawings.

Children's drawings have been used by clinicians as a possible indicator of emotional or psychological problems when physical evidences are lacking. This indirect approach enables children to recollect and remember the events which are sometimes too anxiety producing, if conducted on a verbal or conscious level. According to Burgess and Hartman (1993), drawings give information about how memories have been stored at sensory, perceptual and cognitive levels and so provide insight and comprehension of what had occurred. They stated that the quality of line, disguising shapes, signs and symbols in a drawing may suggest that a child has problems. Hence, children's drawings can be a helpful means of assessing child abuse.

Drawings allow for the expressions of the association between symbols and their meanings and so can be used to explore the personal constructs individuals have about themselves, others and events in their lives (Goodnow, 1977). Human figure drawings

are also capable of offering insights into children's self-concept and attitudes towards themselves and others which other psychological techniques have failed to provide (Burns & Kaufman, 1972).

Drawings have also been used for therapeutic outcomes. van der Kolk (1984) said that drawings provide a direct way in assisting children to reveal what has happened to them. This helps them to reduce or stop living the traumatic experience and to reflect on the experience as a memory. In investigating the frequency of post traumatic stress disorder on some preschool children, Magwaza, Killian, Petersen and Pillay (1993) found that the more children expressed emotional trauma through the medium of art, the less likely they were to suffer from the disorder.

1.1 Historical Overview

The study of children's drawings dates from the late nineteenth century. From 1885 to the 1920's, a taxonomy of children's art was established when children's spontaneous drawings were collected, described and catalogued. This provided a basis for the classification of children's drawings into developmental sequences. Rouma (1913) who made very careful observations of normal children from kindergarten up to the age of 11 years as well as some children with learning difficulties came up with ten stages in the development of drawings of the human figure. However, the most significant of these early classifica-

tions was proposed by Luquet (1913, 1927). His classification of five stages of development was important because it embodied a unifying theory and secondly, it influenced Piaget's subsequent work on developing a theory of intellectual development. Luquet assumed that children's drawings were based on an internal mental model; they did not draw directly from the object they saw but from some form of visual or mental image or picture inside their heads.

In 1904, Schuyten observed that the sequential addition of details to the human figures and the increasingly realistic proportions of the body parts were correlated with chronological age during childhood. However, Rouma (1913) proposed that children's drawings correlated to mental age and this led to the use of human figure drawings as a test of children's intelligence or mental maturity. About 20 years later, Florence Goodenough (1926) devised the more successful and well-known "Draw-a-Man" test which was revised by Harris in 1963. In the Draw-a-Man test, children's drawing of the human figure was assessed by crediting each feature included on the figure to give a score known as the Goodenough Intelligence Quotient.

After 1940, researchers looked at other expressive aspects of children's drawings. First came the analysis of drawings as projections of personality characteristics. In 1949, Machover assessed personality by producing a figure drawing test called the "Draw-a-Person" test which regarded drawings of human figures to project children's self-image. This was based on the assumption that "the drawing of a person represents the expres-

sion of self, or the body, in the environment" (Machover, 1951, p. 348) and "the composite image that constitutes the figure drawn is intimately tied to the self in all its ramifications" (p. 349). The significance of children's drawings in this respect was based on psychoanalytic theory (Freud, 1976). This theory assumed that the inclusion or omission of certain body parts as well as the way they are drawn is related to children's self-image.

The second research tradition was analyzing drawings using emotional indicators devised by Elizabeth Koppitz (1968). She assumed that human figure drawings "reflect primarily a child's level of development and his interpersonal relationships, that is, his attitudes toward himself and toward the significant others in his life" (Koppitz, 1968, p.3). Koppitz's approach embodied a broader concept of an "inner self" compared to Machover's (1949) "body-image". She also assumed that anxieties would be expressed in the drawing as it reflects the current emotional state of the drawer. Koppitz listed the emotional indicators by which children's emotional adjustment or disturbance could be assessed. She emphasized that the degree of adjustment or disturbance is based on the total number of emotional indicators present in a drawing.

A more recent approach in the study of drawings is the understanding of the typical characteristics of children's drawings. Research in this area are concerned with production strategies which have been tested with normal children rather than with clinical samples. Hypotheses relate to the planning and

arrangement of, for example, the different body parts of a single person or the organization of a group of figures on the page. Thus, before making assumptions about the meaning of children's drawings in terms of their personality and/or emotional adjustment, researchers should be sure that the emotional indicators are not merely a result of difficulties in planning. However, there is a possibility that emotional disturbances in children are related to difficulties in planning, both in drawings and other tasks.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Numerous studies of children's drawings carried out in developed countries have found that children's thoughts, development and emotions can be expressed through art. No known similar studies have been carried out in Malaysia to ascertain whether drawings can reveal children's emotional states. To examine whether children's thoughts and feelings are reflected in their drawings, this study compares the drawings of institutionalized and non-institutionalized children.

1.3 Hypotheses

The hypothesis that differences will be found in the drawings of institutionalized and non-institutionalized children is based on the assumption that children in institutions lacking

parental love and care will experience more emotional disturbances than children in intact families who are cared for and loved. Differences in their emotional makeup are therefore discernible in their drawings. Thus, the following hypotheses are set up to investigate differences in the drawings of institutionalized and non-institutionalized children:

HYPOTHESIS 1. The drawings of institutionalized children have more evidences of distorted figures than the drawings of non-institutionalized children.

HYPOTHESIS 2. The human figures are larger than average or smaller than average in the drawings of institutionalized than in the drawings of non-institutionalized children.

HYPOTHESIS 3. There is a greater distance between the figures in the drawings of institutionalized than in the drawings of non-institutionalized children.

HYPOTHESIS 4. Colours such as black, red and purple are more widely used in the drawings of institutionalized children while blue, green, yellow and orange are more common in the drawings of non-institutionalized children.

HYPOTHESIS 5. There is a higher incidence of baselining in the drawings of institutionalized children than in the drawings of non-institutionalized children.

1.4 Definition of Terms

The terms used in this study are:

(a) Art/Drawing

Art or drawing is defined as a symbolic and/or arbitrary code on a flat surface representing an object.

(b) Institutionalized children

Institutionalized children refer to the abused, neglected and/or abandoned children living in an institution, such as the Shelter Home.

(c) Non-institutionalized children

Children who are living in an intact family with both father and mother are defined as non-institutionalized children.

(d) Distorted figures

Drawings of human figures with a poor integration of body parts, gross asymmetry of limbs, absence of certain parts of the body (such as eyes, nose, mouth, legs, hands, feet, neck, torso and arms), very long or very short arms and monster or grotesque figures are referred to as distorted figures.

(e) Baselineing

Baselineing is drawing all figures or objects in the picture on a line or at the bottom of the page.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This is an exploratory study to see whether there are differences in the drawings of institutionalized and non-institutionalized children. If differences are discernible, then drawings can provide an effective way of detecting the emotional state and feelings of young children.

If children express their feelings through art, then drawings can be used to detect emotional problems of young children, especially those who are unable or afraid to verbalize. Teachers and counsellors can be trained to recognize and interpret children's artwork. Drawings can also provide the school counsellor with a simple procedure that does not require extensive training in art or special equipment.

If drawings can be used to identify abused, neglected and abandoned children, then this form of detection can be a means of detecting child abuse in Malaysia, especially of children who are shy, non-verbal and fearful of communicating their innermost thoughts and emotions. In view of the rise in child abuse and neglect in this country, drawings can be used as an informal non-threatening tool to detect child abuse.