

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.0 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether children's emotions, feelings and thoughts can be expressed through art by comparing the drawings of institutionalized and non-institutionalized children. It was hypothesized that differences will be discernible in the drawings as the children in the institution lack parental love and care while the children living in intact families are loved and cared for by their parents. Five hypotheses were formulated and data were collected to accept or reject the hypotheses.

Eight subjects were selected to participate in this study: four institutionalized and four non-institutionalized children. The four institutionalized children were selected from the Shelter Home which houses abused, neglected and abandoned children. The four non-institutionalized children studying in the Garden International School came from intact families with both the father and mother to give them proper care, love and attention.

Each child had to draw a picture of his/her family and a scene at the playground. All the drawings were scored using The Emotional Indicator Scoring System for Human Figure Drawing

(Koppitz, 1968). A total number of emotional indicators of each subject was obtained from both of his/her drawings. Colour and baselining were also used to gauge emotional stress.

5.1 Discussion

The differences between the two groups of children are discussed under six sections:

- (a) Distorted figures
- (b) Size of the figures
- (c) Distance between figures
- (d) Colour
- (e) Baselining
- (f) Trauma features

5.1.1 Distorted Figures

Distorted figures, which are used as indicators of emotional disturbance, were more prevalent in the drawings of institutionalized children than in the drawings of non-institutionalized children. The distortions in the figures were analysed using The Emotional Indicator Scoring System for Human Figure Drawing (Koppitz, 1968). The institutionalized children's drawings revealed a total of 28 emotional indicators compared to a total of 4 emotional indicators in the drawings produced by non-institutionalized children. The emotional indicators in institutionalized children's drawings were poor integration of body

parts. lack of extremities, no body, asymmetry of limbs, no facial features, omission of neck, prominent teeth and grotesque figures. In the non-institutionalized children's drawings long or short arms, big hands and clouds were also discerned.

These findings corroborated with those of Koppitz (1968) who found more emotional indicators in the drawings of emotionally-disturbed children than those of normal children. In a similar vein, Di Leo (1973) found indicators of emotional disturbances such as omission of torso, arms, mouth, unusual proportions of figures and grotesque forms in emotionally-disturbed children's drawings. These indicators rarely occurred in normal children's drawings. Lewis and Greene (1983) also noted "sign of anxiety" in self-portraits of emotionally-disturbed children's drawings. These include omissions and distortions of body parts, heavy lines, raised arms or arms turned inwards and turned down mouth.

Two institutionalized children, five-year-old Case 1 and eight-year-old Case 4 drew stick-figures using single lines to depict the limbs and torsos of their figures. On the other hand, all the non-institutionalized drew conventional figures. However, researchers such as Cox (1993) believe that these kinds of drawings show lack of mental ability but with increasing chronological and mental age, children should be able to add more body parts to the figure. By the age of 5 or 6 years these parts should appear together in a conventional form and replace the tadpole schema. Although this possibility is acknowledged, nonetheless, it is concluded that emotional disturbances are

reflected in the drawings of institutionalized children because their conventional figures displayed more distortions compared to the figures drawn by the non-institutionalized children. For example, Case 4, an eight-year-old institutionalized girl constructed her figures using segmented body parts but the figures showed asymmetry of limbs and disproportionate body parts. Even though Case 2, a 5-year-old institutionalized boy drew contoured figures and used double lines to denote the limbs and body, two of the figures had additional club-like limbs which looked odd. These odd features could reflect emotional disturbance and sexual experience by the institutionalized children.

The figures of all the non-institutionalized children had facial features and extremities while most of the institutionalized children omitted the extremities totally. Researchers such as Di Leo (1970) and Schildkrout, Shenker and Sonnenblick (1972) stated that omission of extremities reflects feelings of powerlessness while Klepsch and Logie (1982) suggested that the absence of extremities indicates insecurity and difficulty in dealing with the environment arising from their feelings of inadequacy, ineffectiveness and helplessness.

All the drawings of the non-institutionalized children showed happy faces which are indicated by an upwardly curved mouth, drawn either as a single line or a heart-shaped mouth. But this was not the case in the drawings of institutionalized children. Case 1 drew an enlarged mouth. This enlarged mouth was found in both drawings. Furthermore in the playground scene,

one of the suns featured teeth quite prominently. In the playground scene, Case 2 drew a human figure with a turned down mouth. Case 3 drew the faces of all the figures as small blobs with no facial features to represent the faces of all the figures. Case 4 drew eyes but one of her drawings also featured prominent teeth and black looming eyes. The drawings of institutionalized children indicate an internal trauma. As posited by Golomb (1992), sadness is portrayed by a downward curving mouth and anger is depicted by the presence of teeth. Buck (1977) also stated that drawings with huge circular mouths are indicative of sexual abuse while prominent teeth suggest aggressiveness.

In conclusion, the findings of the current study are in agreement with those of past research. According to Koppitz (1968), the distortions in the human figure drawings give an indication of children's emotional disturbances. Several other researchers (Buck, 1948; Machover, 1949; Schildkrout, Shenker & Sonnenblick, 1972) have also stated that distortions of the human figure are symbolic representations of inadequacies or distortions of the drawer's self-image as well as reflections of their feelings, fears and anxieties.

5.1.2 Size of the Figures

The size of the human figures also reveals the emotional states of children by employing Koppitz's (1968) criteria. According to her, drawing figures with a height of more than nine

inches or less than two inches or even a slant of more than fifteen degrees suggest emotional disturbance.

The drawings of three of the non-institutionalized children in this study showed the true proportions of the human figures. They also managed to achieved correct size scaling of the figures in their drawings and drew them within the average range. All except one non-institutionalized child drew human figures smaller than average. In contrast, three of the institutionalized children drew either smaller than average, larger than average or slanting human figures.

Golomb (1992) stated that tiny figures are generally associated with anxiety and fear. Drawing tiny figures suggests that the emotional life of the drawer is constricted and shrunk within the self. The depiction of tiny figures is seen as a protective measure. On the other hand, Hammer (1958) said that a large figure compensates feelings of inadequacy. Other researchers (Buck, 1948 and Di Leo, 1970) also said that larger than average human figures are a sign of aggression or grandiosity while smaller than average figures indicate inadequacy, anxiety and depression.

Fox and Thomas (1990) compared children's drawings of Halloween witches and those of ordinary women one week before, one day before and one week after Halloween. They used a questionnaire to assess the children's fear of witches. In their first study, they found that the drawings of witches and women to be significantly smaller at Hallo-

ween than those drawn one week before. But figures of both drawings were larger than those after Halloween. In their second study, Fox and Thomas (1990) compared the drawings of those children who were afraid of witches with those who were not. Those who were afraid of witches drew smaller witches and their drawings of ordinary women were larger compared with the drawings of the children who were not afraid. This finding from Fox and Thomas' (1990) research supports the view that children try to diminish their fear by reducing the size of the threatening topic.

In another investigation, Thomas, Chaigne and Fox (1989) asked 4- to 7-year-olds to copy only the outline of a figure so that they did not have to consider the amount of space that would be needed for any extra features. They were then asked to copy out the figure again, but this time they had to imagine that this figure is either nice or nasty. Children who drew a nasty person drew them smaller than children who imagined the figure to be a nice person. This finding further reinforces the fact that nasty people are drawn smaller than nice people.

Based on the findings of past research, it may be postulated that institutionalized children's smaller or larger drawings are a reflection of a need to suppress their fears, inadequacies and anxieties.

5.1.3 Distance between figures

In this study, the research finding does not support

findings of the West. On the contrary, there was a greater distance between figures in the drawings of non-institutionalized children compared to the institutionalized children. This is because three of the institutionalized children did not draw their real families while all the non-institutionalized children had depicted their complete families. This might be due to the fact that the institutionalized children in this study not only come from single parent families but all of them have been abused, neglected or abandoned. Furthermore, the absence of family members in the drawings of the institutionalized children may indicate that the issue of family relations is painful and they had never experienced being a part of a family. Only one of institutionalized children drew a complete family while another drew a family but the scene did not represent her real family. Furthermore, the institutionalized children could not portray a typical playground scene. Three of them had only drawn a single figure. On the other hand, three of the non-institutionalized children drew children playing happily in the park. As a result, greater distances between figures were depicted in the drawings of non-institutionalized children.

5.1.4 Colour

This study also did not find evidence to show that the non-institutionalized children used blue, yellow, orange and green more widely and the institutionalized children used black, purple and red more commonly. However, the non-institutionalized children used brighter and more coordinated colours while the

institutionalized children used the darker colours. This shows that without realizing it, the institutionalized children are sharing information about their mood and feelings.

According to Golomb (1992), the use of single colours and less concern for realism in the choice of colours may indicate depression, a mood that often characterizes a large proportion of emotionally-disturbed children. For example, in the playground scene, Case 1 drew a snake, a hammer and pools of water and coloured them all black. This scene depicts a child obsessed with being attacked and harmed. In the playground scene, Case 3 also coloured the whole scene with a single colour (which was blue) in a haphazard manner. This may reflect a confused and disturbed child.

More importantly, the institutionalized children tended to prefer single, limited and unconventional colouring schemes. In the drawing of the family, Case 1, had a brown house, pink chimney, pink suns and a pink human figure and a green sun (Figure 4.1). Case 2, in the drawing of the playground (Figure 4.4), had only partially coloured a figure and left the rest of the drawing devoid of colour. Case 4 had used colours which did not represent the realistic attributes of the objects. For example, one figure had dark pink hair on a blue face and multi-coloured limbs.

In contrast, the non-institutionalized children used realistic and conventional colour schemes for all the objects and figures. This was explicitly visible in the playground theme.

For example, Case 8 used brown for the mountains, bench and seesaw but yellow for the sun and green for the grass. The human figures portrayed by the non-institutionalized children had well-coordinated and conventional colours.

5.1.5 Baseline

The hypothesis that there is a high incidence of baselining, which is drawing objects and figures in a straight line, by institutionalized children was not supported by the findings in the study. In the drawing of the family, Case 1 drew one sun at ground level and a human figure above this sun. In the playground scene, he drew objects, such as trees, a hammer, pools of water and a figure, scattered around the page. Case 3 had depicted the family members floating below the roof of the house. Only two of the institutionalized children's drawings depicted some form of baselining. Case 2 had drawn his family members on a baseline (Figure 4.3) and had aligned the playground equipment along the bottom of the page (Figure 4.4). In the drawing of the family (Figure 4.7), Case 4 had also drawn her two figures along the bottom of the page, suggesting a baseline.

On the other hand, the non-institutionalized children included baselines, skylines or horizons in all their drawings. Three of the non-institutionalized children had drawn their family members on a baseline while one of them had drawn it as a group. The playground drawings by this group of children also

depicted prominent skylines and baselines.

Briggs and Lehmann (1989) found baselining to be an indicator of anxiety when they studied drawings of disturbed children. However, this is not true for this group of children.

5.1.6 Trauma features

An additional finding of this study was the possibility that the human figure drawings depicted trauma features. Although the cases in the institution were known not to be sexually abused, some of the features in the drawings of two of the institutionalized children displayed indicators of sexual abuse. The indicators were the presence of enlarged mouths in both the drawings by Case 1 and the explicit depiction of the genitals in the drawing at the playground (Figure 4.4) by Case 2. Case 2 had also drawn some phallic symbols on both the parents and one of the figures had legs pressed together in the drawing of the family (Figure 4.3). According to Koppitz (1968), drawings that depict the genitals suggest aggressiveness. In addition, genitals are more frequently drawn by children who have been sexually abused. Di Leo (1973) also found the inclusion of genitalia to be rare in normal children's drawings. This finding suggests these two children may have been sexually abused or traumatized in some form.

5.2 Limitations of the Study

The study is exploratory in nature. Its findings cannot be generalized because the subjects comprised of only four institutionalized and four non-institutionalized children. Furthermore, only one institution is involved in the study and the subjects are not representative of the whole population of neglected, abused and abandoned children.

The scoring of the drawings was done by two art specialist teachers and the researcher. Even though they were trained by the researcher to use The Emotional Indicator Scoring System for Human Figure Drawing, the problem of accuracy might arise due to their inexperience. Secondly, the accuracy depended on the willingness of the teachers to follow the scoring diligently.

The subjects in this study comprised of children between four to eight years old because children of this age group tend to depict their emotions using symbols. However, being of tender age, the short attention spans might make it difficult for all of them to complete the assigned tasks diligently. Secondly, the instructions might be misinterpreted because of their young age. Thirdly, the short interaction time between the researcher and the children might not elicit their full cooperation and motivation.

Furthermore, knowledge of this topic is based on situations and interpretations in the Western context. Therefore, wrong conclusions as well as assumptions cannot be ruled out because they relate to the Western literature.

5.3 Suggestions for Further Research

The study was an attempt to investigate whether art expresses the thoughts and feelings of children by identifying the differences in the drawings of institutionalized and non-institutionalized children in Malaysia.

The sample of this study was limited to children between four to eight years old in Kuala Lumpur. The view of the fact that the results obtained and the conclusions drawn in this study could not be generalized to the children of this age group at large, studies should be conducted to include a larger number of children from institutions and from various parts of the country to include both urban as well as rural children.

The specific variables investigated in the study have been selected merely for the exploratory nature of the study as well as the pragmatic reason of manageability. Further research may be carried out using variables, such as the cognitive development of children. Correlates such as IQ, age, the drawing skills and the graphic development of emotionally disturbed children can also be included.

The evidence arising from the study shows that children's emotions are expressed through art but the process of executing a drawing is more complex than just drawing a picture as it encompasses a wide range of processes and styles related to different age levels. These factors may be looked at in more

detail and recommended for further research as very little research has been carried out to examine Malaysian children's drawings.