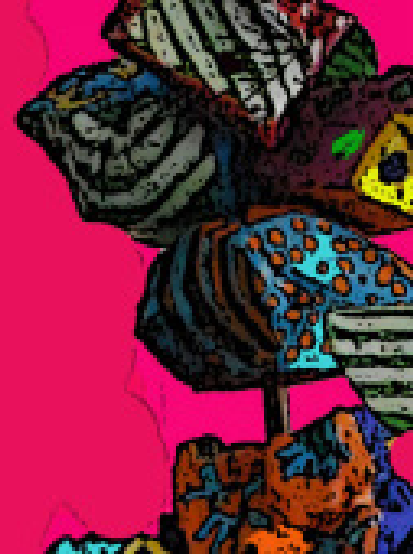


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“Drawing pictures as play” Application of Psychotherapy to Psycho-education at Elementary School

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1. Introduction

Recently, there have been various problems in schools, such as bullying, school refusal, delinquency, and so on. Even among children who go to school regularly and show no significant problems, there is an increasing rate of those who are “unable to express themselves”, “not confident and not self-affirmative” and “unable to control their emotion and behavior.” Therefore, from the standpoint of psychology, classes assimilating encounter group or social skills training have been being tried in class activities or in moral education classes, as preventive and developmental activities or progression-promoting-activities.

“Drawing pictures as play”, which this studies argues, is also in this trend. It was worked out by teachers, who are inspired by play therapy and painting therapy, as a way to cultivate minds of children at schools. In particular, what is expected through these activities is to encourage children to express themselves, to enable them to realize their state of their own minds, and therefore to enable them to get control of emotion and behavior, and also to enable teachers to understand the psychological states of their students.

2. Methods - Procedure of “Drawing pictures as play”

2.1 What is needed: the drawing paper for drawing – “Let’s draw how you are feeling” – (in size of A4). Oil pastels or crayons (set of 12-16 colors).

2.2 Length and frequency: Basically, once a week in the time for morning class activity or ending class activity or general class activities. Required time is 10-20 minutes each time.

2.3 Procedure:

2.3.1 Have children seated, close their eyes to calm down, take a deep breath for about a minute. Make them relaxed.

2.3.2. facilitators should induce children to focus on their own psychological state by making sure what they are feeling at the place and at the time, or by asking what color what their feelings are.

2.3.3. Now Children can open their eyes and draw as they want on the drawing paper with Oil pastels.

2.3.4. If possible, children may title what they have drawn or make a story about the drawing.

2.3.5. Children should compare their feelings with what they have drawn and fill how close they are feeling they are in the “closeness scale”.

3. Psycho-educational mechanism and characteristics of “Drawing pictures as play”

3.1 Method and psycho-educational mechanism of “Drawing pictures as play”

Playing is a natural activity for children and it contributes greatly to their mental development. It may go without mentioning the theories of Winnicott, D.W. or Axline, V.M. et al. where playing was taken into psychological therapy for children that playing itself is valuable to have self-curing effect. The specific procedure of "Drawing pictures as play" was worked out by being inspired by method of induction of Guided affective imagery, meaning of playing in play therapy, and principle of SMMS method. Some additional modifications were added, too. By drawing with oil pastels after they got relaxed, their arousal states were lowered and they were slightly regressed and they got able to experience in their inner world on the ego boundary between consciousness and unconsciousness and by asking what they are feeling at the place and at the time, they were enabled to stare at themselves, and it was gotten easier for them to express. Titling them and making stories about them means tying to consciousness, encouraging their awareness or self-restraint without consciousness, enabling them to contact with real world.

3.2 Framework of the activity at elementary school

At elementary schools, short class activities are scheduled before the first class starts and which is taken place for about 10 minutes after the last class ends. Compared with class works, these activities have less tendency where the teachers are to teach or to evaluate, and have the characteristics of transitional time and place between home life and school life for children.

As well as the attitude of the therapist in the framework of play therapy is important, it is necessary in the framework of "Drawing pictures as play" for facilitators to have acceptive attitude and compathetic understanding and for children in the classrooms to have mutual respect for each other. Especially, because teachers tend to have paternal involvement with children according to the nature of their jobs, the quality of the activity is greatly affected by their degree of acquisition of the points to keep in mind during the practice.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 The procedure of the trails

4.1.1 Subject: In total, 542 children from 1-6 grade (an average of 3.2th), 17 classrooms (an average of 31.9 children/classroom), 12 elementary schools.

4.1.2 Facilitators:12 teachers (6 homeroom teachers, 5 school nurses, 1 lecturer)

4.1.3 Duration: from 6 months to 10 months per school year (an average of 7.4)

4.1.4 Number of trials: from 6 times to 12 times (an average of 11.4).

4.1.5 Process:

4.1.5.1 Before the beginning of "Drawing pictures as play", Facilitators took a grip

on how they were in their daily lives, using “check sheet for grasping actual states of pupils”.

4.1.5.2 Facilitators practiced “Drawing pictures as play” regularly at classrooms (with the procedure described above.)

4.1.5.3 Using “looking back sheet”, facilitators listened to pupils and obtained feedbacks at trimester break

4.1.5.4 Facilitators attended seminars once a month and report what they have observed as facilitators based on the information and the drawings. The clinical psychologist (the author) joined them as a supervisor and carried out assessments and discussed how to support.

4.2 Result of trials and discussions

4.2.1 Experiences of children and effects

4.2.1.1 An activity which all the children in the class can enjoy.

Most of the children at each class in each grade got interested from the warming up period at the beginning and soon got used to the procedure of “Drawing pictures as play” and enjoyed drawing very much. As a result of asking at the end of trimesters for feedbacks using four-point scale, eight children out of ten answered “enjoyed very much” and two children out of ten answered “enjoyed”, and many students answered to open-ended question like “I enjoyed”, “It was fun”, “I was happy”, “I want to do again”, “I looked forward to the day of ‘Drawing’” and so on. According to this, it can be understood as to be an activity that most of the children can enjoy regardless of the stage of their development and intellectual ability.

However, a few student in every classroom at every grade showed anxieties or confusion when they are to draw messily at the warming up and to draw as they like in “Drawing pictures as play”. They would observe facilitators by asking repeatedly “Am I allowed to draw anything?”. They would also observe the drawings or their classmates. After several experience that their drawings were compatetically accepted by the facilitators, they got eased and started to express vigorously in their own ways. This tendency was particularly strong at elementary schools which pupils had to pass entrance examinations to be admitted to. In these cases, it took around three months for them to get able to draw at ease as they want. They stated in feedbacks “Whenever I drew, what to draw had been already decided. This is the first time that I find drawing so enjoyable.” “I have never thought that to draw can be such an enjoyable thing to do.” Thus, it can be suggested that they have always been instructed to draw in order and they are sensitive to be evaluated.

4.2.1.2 Psychological effects on children

As for most of the children, it was observed that just closing their eyes would often

make them wander into the world of imagination, or that they would often enjoy playing being fascinated in drawing and being absorbed in the world they draw.

There were various expressions and exhibitions. The typical one is their feelings such as irritation were expressed when they were questioned what they are feeling. Another typical drawing is fantastical tales or their emotional circumstances were symbolized. And they draw what they are feeling at the very time they are drawing. Past events that remain in their mind or their present anxieties were also typically expressed. And there were typical ones that were filled with one color or several colors, too. From the drawings where their experiences of images or the feelings at the time are expressed or exhibited, it can be known that children got psychological effect to get catharsis or get satisfaction as psychological compensation.

What were pointed out most by them in the feedbacks are effects of catharsis such as “made me refreshed”, “made my mind clear”, “resolution of stress”, and effects of getting psychologically stabilized such as “got me to feel good”, “Drawing made me calm down.” One child out of ten in every class and every grade also mentioned that they got to feel easier to look at the inner world and got able to realize their own feelings. Some children generalized “Drawing pictures as play” and started to draw at home or started to visit the school nurse’s office to draw in case their mood was stimulated. Here effects as stress management or self-management could be seen. In these ways, it was suggested that they may get able to control their emotions and behaviors.

4.2.1.3 Response to children who find difficulties in expressing

Though very little in number as a whole, there are some children who find difficulties in expressing after many occasions. For example, they draw nothing, or they are impossible to draw, or they draw sketches of the stationery in front of them or the characters on the stationery, or they always imitate the drawing of their classmates sitting near them, or so on. But their attitude seems still to be enjoying, while they are adopting a defensive mechanism of their own. This is likely because of the atmosphere of gaiety in the classrooms, and descriptions in feedbacks that express anguish weren’t seen. This activity presupposes that children are not to be forced to draw. However, it goes without saying that attention to the fact that whatever activity teachers conduct in classrooms can be somehow compulsive must be paid sufficiently.

In case of children who find difficulties in expressing for a long time, the likely reasons are a) due to the disposition of those who have developmental disorder, they find it difficult to have imaginations and to look into inner world. b) They are neurotic or something like that, and they have too big psychological problems or anxieties to look into inner world. c) The relation between facilitators are the

problem. For example, they fear the evaluation, or they want to attract interest or attention of facilitators, or they are rebellious. Here are the examples to cope with these problems. a) Spoken to and taken care of individually by the facilitators during the activities, they got able to study at school at ease and got able to hang out with classmates. b) With their drawing as a start, teachers deepened the understandings about psychological state of them, and established a system to support them. c) Understood compathectically about the difficulties they are having through personal interviews, they got to be willing to take part in these activities.

4.2.2 Teacher's experience and effects on them.

4.2.2.1 Positive change in children and classrooms

Through activities of "Drawing pictures as play", teachers became aware of the fact that children show very lively facial expressions that they had never seen in usual classes. Teachers also got to know positive change on children that they gradually got able to express themselves as they were even if they hesitated at first, and got to feel less awkward to draw. Classroom Teachers also had the impression that the atmosphere of the whole classroom became more and more lively. This can be known from that three children out of ten evaluated in the feedbacks after the activities that the classroom became cheerful. Through the evaluation on the change in the children's behaviors and, it was also confirmed that there was good effect on their motivation for learning, from the fact that they got to raise their hands more frequently in the classrooms and the duration they concentrate became longer. These fact clearly indicate that these activities have good effects not only on children individually but also on the school-education-activities.

4.2.2.2 Establishing trustful relationship between children and teachers.

In each classroom and each grade, children wanted to show their teachers their drawings and they spoke to their teachers more often with great affection. The psychological distance between children and teachers became shorter. These tendencies were seen not only between children and facilitators but also between children and teachers who associated the activities. This is likely because what is written below.

The classroom teachers have a role of evaluator because they teach subjects and moral. However, through the activities of "Drawing pictures as play" teachers don't have to teach nor instruct them. And because they accept positively the attitude and the drawings of children, they can express and exhibit themselves without feeling awkward very much. On the other hand, teachers can cultivate positive emotional relationships with troublesome children who they can't help scolding in daily school lives. Thus it is thinkable that trustful relationship be-

tween children and teachers can be established by being accepted by the teachers through their drawings. The trustful relationship constitute the base of all kinds of educational activities. Therefore, it could be suggested that whole classroom may be changed as stated above.

4.2.2.3 Deepening the understanding on children and promoting cooperation between teachers

Once trustful relationship between children and teachers was established, what is related with the psychological issues which children were baring got to be drawn. There were some cases where teachers became confused and had difficulties to determine how to accept the drawings and how to face them. For example, Some children drew a scene of killing something and others drew poop. By attending seminars, teachers learned to understand these expressions as the symbol of their states of their mind and stages of development, or as the signs of psychological crisis and the way teachers faced to children was also changed.

Therefore early detection of those who are potentially in need of support got enabled and personal support through the drawings also got enabled. If facilitators are the nursing teachers or visiting lecturers, facilitators are to spend time talking about the state of children with homeroom teachers, so that homeroom teachers can settle the anxieties or confusion about how to understand children and deepen and share the multi directional understandings. Because of this advantage, the number of cases that homeroom teachers ask nursing teachers for practice of "Drawing pictures as play" has been increased. It can be said that the activities of "Drawing pictures as play" can be the way to promote cooperation between teachers.

5. Conclusions

In this paper I reported what had been accomplished through the trials of "Drawing pictures as play" which the author's group had been developed by reference to play therapy and painting therapy and considered about it. As the result of the trials of "Drawing pictures as play" in the classroom by the teachers, children all enjoyed drawing and got catharsis or got satisfied by psychological compensation, and thus their psychological stability increased. Drawing also had the effects as stress management or self-management.

During these activities, the teachers necessarily provide children with the time when teachers can handle them acceptively and compathetically, thus the shorter psychological distance to children enabled teachers to establish trustful relationship with them. Along with this, expressions and exhibitions of psychological pro-

blems were seen, so teachers could detect psychological problems early and could support individually. Furthermore, the fact that it have good effect on educational occasion such as studying was confirmed. From these result, I conclude that "Drawing pictures as play" can be proposed as an effective psycho-educational approach in elementary schools.