DRAWING ACTIVITIES ENHANCE PRESCHOOLERS SOCIO EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Visual art activities such as the processing of output in the form of drawing encourage children to use their imagination, expression, and multiple intelligences. Through visual art activities, children can participate actively in a more enjoyable learning environment. Drawing is an essential part of children in the production of various forms that can cause excitement, enjoyment, and aesthetic pleasure, thus causing it to become an essential part of the socio emotional development component preschool curricula. The methodology used in this study was a qualitative case study method. The instrument used was a face-to-face semi-structured interview with four preschool teachers under the Ministry of Education, using a purposive sampling technique. The results explain that two themes can be drawn from the interview data, namely, (i) meaningful expression and (ii) active communication. Socio emotional development and imagination are closely related to each other and the main aspects of the development of children to self-control, empathise, and collaborate with others. Therefore, children with problems in the socio emotional development can use a drawing medium to create an imaginary context that might allow them to reassess their identity and do not make mistakes in school.

Keywords: drawing activities, nonverbal drawing technique, socio emotional development, preschoolers

INTRODUCTION

Drawing provide a window to the children's socio emotional development (Betts, 2013). In understanding the socio emotional content in children's drawing, it is essential to respect their creative work even it is difficult to comprehend because socio emotional problems are not easily understood and experienced differently by every child (Dillon & Spelke, 2017). Therefore, to identify the socio emotional development based on children's drawing is not an easy task. However, arts are one of the few modalities that can contain many emotions simultaneously (Malchiodi, 1998).

Machón (2013) stated that children's drawings are the interpretation of their happiness, restlessness, fear, or sadness in drawings. A drawing reflects the influences of sociocultural aspects from adults of various cultures towards children (Shinskey & Jachens, 2014; Winkler-Rhoades et al., 2013). However, researchers must realise that drawing is a medium and a step towards the interpretation of the meaning produced by children (Dillon & Spelke, 2017).

Similarly, Machón (2013) stated that drawing could serve to help children in their development process because children at the schema stage can describe more recognisable emotional images. For example, when children are asked to create an image of happy, angry, and sad, they will usually respond with the image of a smiley face or a face with big teeth (content), gruesome face or crooked smile (angry), sad face (sad), or other expressions that can be seen in their drawings (Malchiodi, 1998). This opinion was supported by Golomb (2004), who stated that until the age of 10, children use facial expressions to express emotions, using curved lines, eyebrow, and sometimes tears to express sadness when asked to express certain emotions. Therefore, drawing can serve as a tool to identify the children's socio emotional status (Badillo et al., 2014).

Problem Statement

The use of teaching method based on drawing activity has a profound impact on children's socio emotional development. This is because the implementation of drawing activities enables children to manage and express their emotions in the right way (Dillon & Spelke, 2017). However, drawing activities are not emphasized in terms of the development of children's socio emotional especially in the meaningful context they wish to convey to others. This is proven by the study of Osher and Chasin (2016) who found that although 80% of parents consider child socio emotional development is important, they want to place a strong emphasis on basic reading, writing and counting skills (3M). So drawing is just an activity in the classroom. Children cannot express their feelings to interact with others (Danby & Farrell, 2005).

Cox (2005) stated that children's drawings are interpreted from adult's perspective who focus more on what they observe and want to express the result of the painting through communication process. This is supported by Anning and Ring (2004) who claimed that in such developmental theories, there is more focus on the technical and cognitive aspects of painting than enhancing children's communication processes. This clearly isolates and ignores children's communication skills and their thinking processes and the context of their lives as well as the meaning they wish to convey in a painting (Thompson & Tawell, 2017).

Children's Drawings

Based on the standard level of artistic development, preschoolers are in the early pre-schematic stage, the first representation to emerge and be recognised. At this stage, children can produce drawings to express meaning.

By the end of age five, various forms will appear, such as the sun or a circle analogous to a pie chart that is called a mandala. These symbols will be associated with real things that are natural to them. For example, children can use the mandala at the window of their house (Wright, 2003).

At the age of six, preschoolers can draw a happy face and use colour as an additional resource to express emotion (Cox, 2005). Excellent fine motor skills enable them to hold pencils firmly. However, as in a child's development, artistic development is different for each child. Also, Cox (1992) stated that children's drawings tend to look tiny, representing only some specific features to symbolise objects.

Although children use various visual methods and other means of communication in the growing digital and multimodal culture, studies show that preschoolers are still using the traditional tools of drawings and involved in drawing activities at least once a week (Anning & Ring, 2004).

National Preschool Standard Curriculum (KSPK) in Malaysia

Curriculum Conceptual Model in the National Preschool Standard Curriculum (KSPK) introduced in 2017 manifests the aim of preschool education of emphasising the children development in seven domains, namely cognitive, spiritual, moral, physical, social, emotional, and creative (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2017) as the preparation for formal education in year one. The development of socio emotional development in the preschool curriculum in Malaysia focuses on the mastery of emotional maturity and social skills. Mastering these skills enable children to learn to control emotions, thoughts, and self-actions to achieve positive emotions so that they can understand the needs, emotions, and opinions of others to adapt to society and build social skills (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2017). The importance of socio emotional development are also emphasised in each document of early childhood education in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales (Lindon, 2005) as well as in Malaysia.

Socio emotional development is an important aspect that should be given attention in early childhood development. The existence of positive socio emotional development in early childhood equips children to grow up with a strong identity. Many studies had been conducted to prove the existence of a positive relationship between children's socio emotional development at an early age with the establishment of their personality and personal character in the future.

Socio Emotional Development and Its Relation to Drawing

Drawing can highlight the point of view or expression of a child more than speaking or writing that may generate a more detailed or more general definition about an object or a situation (Anning & Ring, 2004). For example, preschoolers may have limited resources to express ideas or objects through a written language because they have not learned to form all letters or produce a complete sentence (Christensen, 2004). Instead, they use the resources available to them, such as observation and environmental influences, to say something to others through drawing (Clark, 2011).

Drawing a beneficial tool for identifying children's socio emotional development (Driessnack, 2005; Hill, 1997; Thomson, 2008). Children's drawings are unique and different from each other because they have socio emotional interpretations according to their specific environment, situation, or context (Majita Ahmad Sultan et al., 2016). For example, Cox (1993) stated that drawings produced by children are not just the action of a natural maturation process but also involves their socio emotional development. However, this process is influenced by their cultural environment (Cox, 2005).

The continued development in the social and cultural perceptions during childhood and their selection as participants showed that children could be involved in the research process (Christensen, 2004; Clark, 2011; James & Prout, 1997). Many researchers see

drawings as child-friendly (Coates & Coates, 2011). Therefore, the use of drawings guarantees children-centred research (Muhamad Firdaus Ramli & Rofidah Musa, 2020). Previous studies show that children's drawings are used as a tool that allows the child to react and engage openly (Einarsdottir et al., 2009).

Children's drawings are unique as the environment influences each child's interpretations, situation, or context they are in (Mohd Kamal Mohd Ali et al., 2013). Children draw for several reasons, among which is facilitating socio emotional development and expression, translating feelings and emotions, conveying information, as centre aesthetic objects, or only as a pastime (Matthews, 1997; 2003). Children's drawings are a means of communication to express their emotions (Einarsdottir et al., 2009).

Application of Drawing in Integrating Children Socio Emotional Development

To encourage the involvement of children wholly, Hill et al. (2004) demands States Parties to respect children's rights, including their right to express their opinions and make decisions in matters affecting them. Children have the right as social actors and have the knowledge to act and interpret their world (Bitou & Waller, 2011; Farrell, 2005; James & James, 2004; James et al., 1998; Mayall, 2002; 2000; Moss & Petrie, 2002). Therefore, children can be trusted as active participants (Alderson, 2005) and the provider of credible information (Morrow, 2005). Children can comprehend, investigate, and contribute to the research process, including drawings and emotional expressions that deserve the necessary attention (Christensen & James 2000; Greig et al., 2007; Uprichard, 2010). As suggested by Fraser et al. (2014), in the framework of this study, children are the focus of research, knowledge, and data involving them in the data collection process.

Research Objective

This study aims to explore socio emotional development of preschoolers through drawing activities. Some specific objectives have been developed as follows:

1. To explore children's meaning expression based on the drawings they produce during drawing activities.
2. To explore the communication processes existed in children's drawings.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study selected case study as the research strategy. Case studies are aligned with qualitative research design (Yin, 2014). Case study strategies are consistent with the nature of the study and the types of data collected and analysed in this study. This strategy is ideal for single case analysis as it produces detailed and complete results (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The advantages of semi-structured interview and document analysis are transparent research methods because the coding scheme and sampling procedure can be clearly defined (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, further review and further study should be carried out in the future.

Research Sampling

Participants in this study were four preschool teachers with experience of preschool teaching between 10 and 18 years old. All selected preschool teachers have a bachelor degree in early childhood education and have a master's degree in preschool education. All participants were female, aged 35 to 48 years. In addition, the preschool teachers teach six-years-old in preschool under the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE).

Data Collection Method

As this is a qualitative study, data collection was carried out using triangulation method which is interview and document analysis. The purpose of this triangulation is to complement, enhance and strengthen data collection because in qualitative studies, data are collected from interviews as premier data while document analysis as secondary data. This is consistent with Bryman's (2012) opinion that the analysis of document content against secondary data is useful when studying a sensitive issue because it is written without realizing that document content analysis is likely to be done in the future. Thus, interviews were conducted in a semi-structured way to enable information gathered from the participants of the study while the document analysis using children's drawings during drawing activities was conducted in the classroom to support the interview data.

Data Analysis Technique

Upon completion of the data collection, audio interviews were transcribed and subsequently coded, while drawings were used as a medium to highlight meaningful expression and communication processes between teachers and children involved in the study. Typically, data analysis in case studies is thematic, which is a technique for identifying and analysing forms (themes) in data (Bryman, 2012). Therefore, in this study a thematic analysis was conducted to explore children's socio emotional development according to the themes formed based on coded data. This analysis was performed using NVivo12 software.

RESULTS

This section discusses the findings of the interviews. Data were obtained from the interviews with the four preschool teachers. Two themes can be drawn from the interview, namely, (i) meaningful expression and (ii) active communication.

Meaningful Expression

Children's expression highlights a more profound meaning and individual perspective as well as reflects their reality. Any emotional expression is not only about a phrase but more to the process of hearing and be heard that should be taken seriously. This perspective is seen as an opportunity for children to express their emotions.

> *Whatever they drew really has its own meaning... We must ask the children what are their true intentions ... (T1)*

True...sometimes through drawings, the children want adults to know of what they want to tell us...so, we must concern of what they want to tell us... (T3)

Children's emotional expression would allow adults to adapt to their needs and understand their socio emotional. Children express their emotions through active interaction with various people and situations.

Okay, after I asked what they meant, they explained to me and it made it easy for me to help them... (T2)

Sometimes, it is hard for children to tell us verbally...there must be things like drawings...when we ask then they talk to us...easy for me to prepare anything they need... (T4)

Children's expression is a diverse and multidimensional social construction that changes the dynamic interaction process. This perspective is consistent with the sociocultural theory where children's socio emotional are affected and explained by daily context, experience, and human relations.

Whatever they say are considered as a communication process with other people...they will talk when there is a thing like this drawing...they will talk when we ask... (T1)

Sometimes, I found that they talked to their friends after they drew...they talked about the drawings...I saw there was a good interaction process... (T3)

I witnessed a fun process because they wanted to tell about their drawings...they will answer when their friends asked...it is good to have such an interaction process going on... (T4)

In this study, socio emotional is seen as a means for children to say whatever they do and convey whatever they think. Children's socio emotional can be heard by creating space to convey an understanding in the mode and medium suitable for their development, which is drawing.

With this drawing activity, I could hear the children's expression through drawings...there are happiness, sadness and some are angry... (T2)

They express so many things through drawings...all sorts of feelings...happy, sad, excited, furious, angry...all that can be identified through drawings... (T1)

This study encouraged children to use drawing as a language to express their emotions about things that become the main subject of the drawings that are often misunderstood, ignored, or deemed irrelevant by adults. This allows researchers to see children's drawings and interpret their views on socio emotional in daily experience from the children's point of view. This study also provided information about the influences of other people and the environment on the children's thoughts, feelings, and expression.

Communication Process

Listening is an active, interactive, and reflective communication process involving hearing, interpreting, constructing, and expressing meaning. It is a dynamic and ethical process that is open to different communication modes in a focused environment.

> *I just listened to them which sometimes makes sense...but I listened to them carefully, so they will not feel disheartened... (T3)*

> *I listened to them until the end...I enjoyed all sorts of stories but I shared the moral lesson of the stories and shared my opinions as well... (T1)*

Listening is an active verb that involves interpretation and giving meaning to the message and value to those who are being given attention. Children use various symbols and codes to express their socio emotional.

> *Through the objects they drew, I asked what is this? What is that? Later they explained to me...I listened and I cared... (T2)*

> *As a teacher, I must give attention to what the children talked about even though I did not understand the symbols and objects they drew...that is why I listened carefully and tried to understand... (T4)*

From this perspective, drawings can be defined as a verbal and nonverbal interactive process or, in other words, through different sentence production modes, constructing meaning, and theory. Listening assists researchers in understanding how children express their socio emotional and how children respond to interpreting their emotions.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on the results of this analysis, this study suggests that any emotion expression is not just about an expression but may be more of a listening process that needs to be taken seriously. This is because, children draw to tell their experiences to others. Thus, nonverbal drawing techniques for exploring the social status of children's internal emotions can be heard and given attention by parents and teachers in understanding their socio emotional (Skybo et al., 2007; Hamama & Ronen, 2009). In addition, these findings are also in line with the study conducted by Daglioglu et al. (2010) stated that drawing gives children the opportunity to explore an experience and to express it through their own interpretations. Any emotional expressions shared by children enable adults to adapt to their emotional needs and social understandings.

In addition, drawing activities are not just a description or expression of children in relation to their social environment, but also a dialogue between the children and the reality they know. This is because, the active communication process creates space for different modes of communication in a focused environment. Children use a variety of symbols and codes to express their utterances. Therefore, the process of listening in children's communication involves interpreting, giving meaning to their messages and values to parents and teachers. Drawing help parents and teachers understand how children express socio emotional and how children respond to interpret emotions in reality. This method is the basis

of learning for children and enables them to develop their social skills in preschool (Durlak et al., 2015). This view is supported by (Ionescu, 2015) who stated that socioemotional development of each child influences their success in a preschool.

Based on this finding, it is clear that the use of drawing is very appropriate to attract children to participate in the study. This is because the use of drawing has the advantage of certain features for preschoolers to use such as expressing meaningful emotions and enhancing their communication process with others. This finding is also supported by Dewaraja et al. (2006) who stated that drawing is used as a medium to identify children's anxiety levels by expressing their feelings effectively. Besides, drawing is an effective way to collect data directly from preschoolers regarding their socio emotional development (Oster & Crone, 2004; Tanaka & Sakuma, 2004). Therefore, drawing activities can give children the opportunity to express themselves in meaningful ways, thus improving the communication process more effectively in their daily activities.

Therefore, the present study could be continued by other researchers in the future by engaging more experienced teachers in preschool to gain different perceptions and opinions on the benefits of drawing activities to children. Other studies can also be done by focusing on other aspects such as the cognitive, physical, creativity and perceptions of children through drawing activities. With further research as suggested, research on early childhood development is expected to highlight the ability to interact, speak, express feelings, respect and so forth through drawing activities.

CONCLUSION

Drawing activities give children an opportunity to interact and improve their social skills and thus enhance their socio emotional development. For example, they interact with each other during drawing activities. This gives children an opportunity to express their feelings, to be respectful of each other, which is also the basis for instilling a sense of tolerance with everyone. Thus, drawing activities can enhance children's socio emotional development while also helping to balance their imaginative power.

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