

The Interpretation of Co-working Artwork with Parents of Children with Cleft Lip and Palate

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Background: Cleft Lip and Cleft Palate (CLP) children are clearly distinguishable from other children due to obvious oral or facial defects. CLP children tend to be dissatisfied with their appearance, have low levels of self-esteem, and hold distorted perceptions about their own face when compared to groups who have undergone less visible surgeries. Family art therapy should be introduced to this group of children to have them gain self-reliance and positive perceptions about themselves.

Objective: To interpret the meaning of pieces of artwork created by CLP and craniofacial deformed children via collaboration with their families in the form of family art therapy.

Materials and Methods: A qualitative method was used to interpret the meaning of pieces of artwork created freely by CLP and craniofacial deformed children. Parents were allowed to assist the children doing the drawing. The children were from five families and participated in drawing pictures on A2 pieces of paper with chalk colors. Family Art Therapy involved parent-child collaboration in the creation of artwork prior to interpreting its meaning via a clinical psychology process.

Results: The CLP children and their families were able to freely create their artwork through family art therapy. There was suitable development among the CLP children exposed to this type of treatment, and the children realized that an imperfect physical appearance does not need to be a barrier to living a normal life.

Conclusion: Positive self-acceptance was associated with less visible surgical scars among the CLP patients.

Keywords: Interpretation, Artwork, Cleft lip-palate, Family art therapy

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Family art therapy is an offshoot of art therapy through which artwork is used to heal CLP children's mental health and tighten relationships among family members⁽¹⁾. Therapists are responsible for observing the interaction between parents and their children⁽²⁾. They also encourage the parents to interact verbally with their children using positive verbal reinforcement and body language to help the CLP youth in maintaining desirable behaviors⁽³⁾. Interpretation of the pictures focuses on the artistic signs embedded in the pictures and how the pictures help transfer the children's past experiences to the audience⁽⁴⁾. In psychology, pictures are also used to assess CLP children's mental health⁽⁵⁾. In the House-Tree-Person mental health test⁽⁶⁾, children are asked to draw a sequence of pictures starting from a house, a tree, and a man. The pictures resulting from this task help in decision-making about appropriate

treatment for the patients. Drawing a picture helps to reflect the patients' perceptions about themselves⁽⁷⁾. While self-perception is more positive among patients who have undergone less visible surgeries, cleft lip-cleft palate and craniofacial deformed children tend to be unhappy with their appearance⁽⁸⁾. CLP adolescents also tend to be poorly adjusted, and some are reported to have distorted perceptions about their own face⁽⁹⁾. It is essential to provide support for this group of children in order for them to be able to live a normal and happy life.

Objective

To interpret the meaning of artwork by means of family art therapy through which CLP and craniofacial deformed children and their parents collaborate to complete artwork.

Materials and Methods

Study design

Qualitative study design.

Participants

The participants were 5 CLP or craniofacial

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deformed children ages 4 to 10 years old who had undergone surgery. One had a clear deep scar from the operation while the other four did not have visible scars. The children together with their parents joined the activity as part of a camp aimed to help participants gain self-esteem. The camp was held from 28 to 29 June, 2018.

Procedure

Each family was given a piece of drawing paper (A2, size 420x594 mm) and a set of chalk colors. During the thirty-minute drawing period, patterns of parent-child interaction were observed. Specifically, observers noticed participation patterns, types of leadership that were used, and how language was used (for reprimanding or complimenting). A limitation was that the observers did not keep a written record of the behaviors, and recollection of the data may have allowed for some bias.

Analysis

Interpretation differs from assessment to the extent that the former is based on an individual's perceptions of the subject at hand, while the latter implements a clear rating scale. Interpretation of artwork in art therapy is based on Freudian and Jungian's framework for mental analysis, which has three components, namely: 1) Spontaneous expression, 2) Transference, and 3) Amplification and Active imagination⁽¹⁰⁾. Spontaneous expression is the free expression of one's own subconscious without external directives. Based on this type of expression, participants are asked to draw pictures without restraint, helping them to freely express any matters weighing on their mind. Transference is symbolic transferring of the patients' experiences to persons significant to them, such as parents. Amplification and Active Imagination is a conscientious interpretation of the picture, which is not based solely on the image itself but rather, takes into account the importance of other contexts, such as the narration of a story, spoken words, imagination, or creative ideas.

Ethical approval

The present study was approved by the Khon Kaen University Human Research Ethics Committee: Project number HE611521.

Results

There were altogether five pictures created by the CLP children with their parents via the free drawing activity. In Figure 1. Picture A was a picture of a house, people, and trees. The picture was decorated with flowers, birds, balloons, the sun, and clouds. It was paved with the dark brown color of the ground. Picture B was a picture of a striking yellow house with orange roof. Other components of the picture included people, buffaloes, trees, a pond, and piles of straw. The top of the picture had the sun and some clouds. Picture C consisted of apples, a house, a rainbow, flowers, clouds, people, and three suns. Picture D was colored with colored pencils and included a hut in the middle of a valley with rice



Figure 1. Innovation Artwork of Children's with Cleft Lip and Cleft Palate (CLP).

fields and a big river to the side of the picture. Picture E consisted of a horse, snake, fish, turtle, crocodile, rainbow, pond, mountain, and sun.

Based on Table 1, when the therapist instructed the children to draw a picture of their own choice, four out of five children drew a picture of a house, with only one child drawing an animal. The houses that the children drew were interpreted in terms of the sense of security cultivated in a house, as the house is the place that provides basic needs⁽¹¹⁾, such as love, food, shelter, and affection. Pictures of trees, the sun, and mountains show that the children pay attention to their surroundings, including objects outside of themselves and outside of their homes. Overall, the children were able to draw pictures in line with their maturity. The children's interpretations of their pictures reflected that they accept their appearance and feel secure and confident. They did not appear to believe that a facial deformity was a hindrance in living normal lives. The pictures reflected that children from four of the families had mental security and their basic needs were met, despite some children relying on their grandparents to raise them. Picture E (10 years), of different types of animals, was created by a child whose mother was the main caretaker and who was the only participant who had a deep, clear facial scar from the CLP operation. It is possible this child did not accept his own image. Therefore, he tended to turn his attention away from the image of himself by drawing pictures of the things around him instead. It can be concluded that self-acceptance is associated with less visible surgical scars.

Discussion

Drawing a picture of a house is equated with self-representation or a self-portrait. Drawing a picture of a person can be more complicated, as producing a detailed picture of a person reflects one's self-concept and family interactions⁽¹²⁾. For that reason, most of the children decided to draw pictures of a house before pictures of people, which is consistent with child development⁽¹³⁾. A previous study on free picture drawing by children ages 6 to 7 years old reported that 60 percent of the children drew pictures of houses. This research

Table 1. Summary result of interpretation of artwork of children

Picture	Main theme of spontaneous expression	Transference	Amplification and active imagination
A	House and environment	Need love and attention	Insecure, Imagination, Children drawing
B	Big house	None	Self-image, Imagination
C	Free association	Need love from father	Fantasy, Children drawing
D	Natural house	None	Realism
E	Free association	None	Imagination

was inconsistent with previously conducted research on teenagers' self-perceptions, which identified two patterns: 1) Children did not have a clear self-identity⁽¹⁴⁾ and the perception of their physical appearance was obscure at the ages of 10 to 11 years old⁽¹⁵⁾ or 2) Children believed that CLP had an effect on their lives and surgery resulting in less visible scarring⁽⁸⁾ was crucial. Nowadays, technology makes it possible to conduct CLP operations without leaving a scar on the patient's face. As for analyzing the pictures for purposes of evaluation and treatment, there are two principles that can be applied: structural analysis and content analysis. The activity used for this research, however, may not allow for a complete interpretation of the child's self-perception, as parents took part in the work. Other factors that should be incorporated into observations for more holistic interpretation are: demeanor while completing the drawing task, the positivity and negativity of language used, inspiration and encouragement offered, and the level of energy put into the task. Doing artwork and playing help to increase family interaction⁽¹⁾, which is the main purpose of family art therapy. Finally, it should be noted that this research was conducted with a relatively small group of participants. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized for the larger population.

Conclusion

This research aimed to interpret the meaning of pictures drawn by CLP children in order to obtain a better understanding of children with CLP, especially their view toward themselves and their level of self-satisfaction. In psychotherapy, it is important to conduct a clear evaluation of interventions in order to know how well the applied treatment method works. Art therapy can also be used to correct other types of children's behaviors, such as aggressiveness in a complicated family relationship. Artwork may help create positive interactions and communication. To benefit the interpretation of the pictures, future research should record family member interactions that occur while the artwork is being created.

What is already known on this topic?

Positive self-acceptance was associated with less visible surgical scars among the CLP patients.

What this study adds?

Family art therapy as used in this research helps

increase interactions between CLP children and their parents. The therapy triggers conversation, ideas, and creativity more successfully than if the children work individually. This research should have added processes to generate more conversation among family members.

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Potential conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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