

The Exercise “Drawing the Music” as a Means of Psychodiagnosis of Children with Neurological Diseases and Mental Disorders

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Abstract

The article presents the author’s position, which lies in the fact that the psychotherapeutic exercise “Drawing Music” can be used as a diagnostic test instrument. For this purpose, the author used drawing with watercolors, made by a child in the process of perceiving Tchaikovsky’s piano play “Sweet Dream” by live performance. Psychologist plays the music piece on the piano. Analysis of the drawings allows to assess the level of the child’s current mental development and/or to clarify his diagnosis.

Keywords: Psychodiagnostics; Music Therapy; Neurological Diseases; Classical Music

Introduction

Scholars of different countries and areas of science demonstrate in their researches considerable psychotherapeutic potential of the music [1-4,8-10,14-21]. The results of our research on the psychotherapeutic impact of “live” classical music were presented earlier [5-7,11-13]. A piano piece by Tchaikovsky “Sweet Dream” was used as an example of such music. The analysis of a large number of drawings (more than 600) performed in the process of children with neurological diseases and mental disorders listening to this musical work allowed to assume that the drawings made in the process of psychotherapeutic exercise “Drawing the Music” can be used as a psychodiagnostic tool.

Methods

Analyzing the drawings made while listening to the music, we paid attention to the following things: correspondence between individual images of the picture and objective content of the music (in general); general emotional undertones of the drawing; color scheme (main, prevailing colors); the number of colors used; color combinations: contrast or similarity between the color shades, intensity of these characteristics; hue saturation. Special attention was paid to the main characteristics of the drawing: brightness, clarity, detail. Also, it was taken into account whether the drawing consisted of separate parts or had a single storyline. We evaluated the way the drawing was presented: as a combination of color splashes different in size, by quantity; lines (broken, irregular, smooth); shapes (angular, sharp, rounded, soft); images (nature, everyday life, science and technology, sports, fairytale, fantasy). Also, attention was focused on the composition of the drawing.

It was observed and recorded what colors and in what order the child choosed. The choice of color in many cases showed significant positive dynamics in the development of the child with each subsequent perception.

Results

The drawings by hysterical, disinhibited, anxious children were notable for saturation of colors and details, high number of strokes. The drawings made by aggressive children were filled with very bright, irritating, saturated colors, poorly combined with each other, multiple details, angular shapes. Children with cerebral palsy, hysteria, autism often drew images of objects upside down, made repetitive drawings, even after a long period of time.

For example, we used the psychotherapeutic exercise “Drawing Music” to examine a child with a neurological pathology in a day neurological hospitalization at a child health center. The special education teacher was unable to identify the cause of the unexpected decline in the child’s intellectual development by traditional methods of psychodiagnostics. The teacher was concerned about the lack of progress in the cognitive development of Sasha K. (6 years old, mental retardation). For 3 years, this child showed a desire, an interest in classes with the teacher. The collaborative efforts of the teacher and the boy ensured a steady positive dynamics. Suddenly, the child began to demonstrate serious setback in new knowledge absorption and absence of previously learned knowledge and skills. The teacher could not understand the reason for such an unexpected sharp deterioration in the child current intellectual development. She assumed that he was naughty, mischievous, fooling around. She addressed to a psychologist with this issue. In the process of classes with the child, the exercise “Drawing Music” was used. In the process of perceiving Tchaikovsky’s piano play “Sweet Dream” by live performance was proposed. In the middle of the play, when the melody sounded in a small octave, the boy covered his ears with his hands and asked to stop playing the music. It was noticeable that the child suddenly became very annoyed by the sounds of a soft, beautiful, smooth melody. Watching the child, it was possible to suppose that he hears a terrible rumble. The music had to be stopped immediately. It was impossible to exclude the inadequacy of the auditory impression of the child, and it could indicate a more complex pathology.

Let us give an example of how the choice of color may indicate a positive dynamic in the mental development of a child.

Cyril K. (5.5 years old, organic lesion of the brain) was asked to draw with watercolors in the process of perceiving Tchaikovsky’s “Sweet Dreams” in a live performance. The boy filled the entire sheet of paper with black colour and placed a dark green spot in the middle of the sheet. He explained what he depicted in the picture: “A car goes at night”. Cyril’s mother, when she saw the drawing, was surprised. She said that all the previous drawings of the boy were sheets entirely filled with black colour. For the first time she saw another color in the drawing of her son. In the next class, the boy drew a green car. In the third class, he painted an orange house, in the fourth - a red house, in the fifth - a green tank, in the sixth - a steamer sailing through the waves (all pink), etc. The drawings were also made with watercolors in the process of perception of Tchaikovsky’s “Sweet Dream”. In addition, the psychologist offered the mother a list of musical compositions that could be used in the process of home classes with the child. Cyril’s mother did not play any musical instrument, so in the home classes recorded music was used.

Conclusions

The analysis of the drawings made while listening to Tchaikovsky’s “Sweet Dream” allows to assert that it can be used as an effective psychodiagnostic tool. The results of this analysis provide an opportunity to clarify the diagnosis, assess the current level and trace the dynamics of mental and personal development of the child.

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