

# The Drawing as a Help in Child-Psychotherapy<sup>1</sup>

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Encouragement, in the terms of Individual Psychology, is in itself a real psychotherapy. It is used as a means to stimulate the creative power of a human being toward new possibilities still unknown or without any expressive form. In child-psychotherapy it is possible to shorten the work by adding the help of drawing to verbal encouragement.

Let us put aside without diminishing its value in diagnosis the study of colors, forms, symbols, lines, spatial place, etc.

Our aim is to use drawing as a means:

1. To awaken in the child an unemployed and blocked capacity: to orient this capacity afterward toward a useful goal.
2. To explain to the child his style of life. Through the drawing, with the help of the therapist, he can become aware of his present subjective state (lack of confidence in himself and in the world, lack of courage to begin something, doubt in his real capacities).
3. To provide the child with encouragement by letting him observe his own progress and changes through successive steps of accomplishment.

This method is especially useful in shy, discouraged, inhibited children. The child is given the choice of his first work. (Sometimes when a child is absolutely negative and opposing, he will not even take the pencil.) These first drawings are generally cold, static, ruler-drawn, pale-colored, without any human beings. A little later the therapist suggests to the child that he draw a scene with people, insisting that it does not matter if it is not a perfect picture—(generally the child pretexts his clumsiness to make objects only)—that it is more interesting to draw something where people are moving. Dreams, games or quarrels in the school yard, races, are suggested. We allow and encourage the child to express himself in a new mood.

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An evolution then takes place which can be observed not only by a change in the choice of the drawings, but even by a more active, sometimes aggressive behaviour. If he is better able to understand this change, it becomes easier also to explain it to the parents. They are often far from having a clear understanding of their child and they can observe how clumsy and ill-at-ease he felt and how he is changing.

Some cases will illustrate the use of children's drawings as a method of therapy. We shall not give every detail of the psychotherapeutic sessions, being satisfied to show the beginning of latent capacity under encouragement.

#### CASE ONE

Gerard, aged five and one-half, a teacher's son, was shy, awkward and inattentive. His ambitious parents were very disappointed with with his first month at school. I proposed to him that he make a fine picture while I talked with his mother. The latter remarked in a categorical tone that the boy did not know how to draw. Without insisting, I left the child, but later, on coming back to him, I was obliged to insist a moment before he would take the pencil. He was sure he was unable to draw since his mother had said so. After a while he put the point on the paper, making a little dot. When asked to draw a tree, he made a tiny line on the lower part of the sheet which was lost, almost unseen. Admiring his skill, as opposed to his mother's negativistic attitude, I said to him, "Trees are like babies. They grow very slowly, but they grow and change into big trees. You, also, like a little tree will grow up and be able to do everything like adults." Gerard was very pleased. He began to extend the dot to an up-going, big, strong line. Encouraged by his boldness, he threw branches in every direction, in length and in size so that, his sheet of paper being too small for his new ambition, he began to draw on the table.

It was the beginning of his awakening. He quickly gained confidence due to his strong nature and to the good will and the understanding attitude of his parents.

#### CASE TWO

Claude, aged eight, an only son, was pampered by his parents who, disappointed by the results of their over-protective education, constantly found fault and remonstrated with him. The child was reticent and dis-

agreeable. His first drawings were conventional and drawn with a ruler, prettily colored, but presenting no life nor movement.

*Drawing 1.* This showed a pretty house surrounded by a flower garden. Everything was closed: door, windows, gate. No smoke came from the chimney.

*Drawing 2.* This showed a ship lying on a waveless sea without any sailor or any smoke coming from the big funnel.

*Drawing 3.* This showed the kitchen of his house with every detail: table, pots, gas stove. Nobody was in the place.

*Drawing 4.* Claude began to draw the same kitchen. Asked to draw human beings who move, such as a scene from reality or a dream, he began to laugh and to draw without a word.

In the same kitchen he added a boy (himself) armed with a shovel, looking angrily at two adults in front: a woman with a rattle in her hand and a man with a broom (his parents). Everything moved in this dramatic scene which he stated was a recent dream. On the ground under the table lay a turned over, broken soup tureen with smoke rising from it. The drawing was without color. For the first time Claude seemed very pleased with his drawing. His real subjective family situation appeared on the paper as he never would have dared to explain in words.

*Drawing 5.* Beginning quickly, Claude drew a pitched battle between musketeers. Swords intersected, guns fired, bullets exploded. To go more quickly, he made the swords before making the fighting men. The most important thing was the fight. Once more, his drawing was colorless.

*Drawing 6.* Claude drew a fortified castle surrounded by a trench full of water. The drawbridge was lifted. On a road there was a compact troupe of assailants. On another road coming from the castle, there were the defenders. At the battlements there were other soldiers.

After his family situation exposure, here came the proof of his loneliness. Being afraid of the assailants (his parents with their curiosity, their questions, their perpetual remarks), he had closed himself up and now stood alone.

I now could explain to him his difficulties of exchange with others which came from a fear of intrusion into his own business. "It is not a risk to shut down the drawbridge when a person is courageous. Why

do you think that others will come only for battle? They can have peaceful intentions, too."

At the next session, his mother expressed a happy surprise. She stated that there was now a real relaxation in the connection between Claude and his parents. The boy came to me, took his pencil and began to draw, saying with a twinkle, "Then do I shut down the draw-bridge?"

### CASE THREE

Bernard, aged nine, was shy and very dependent upon his parents, especially his father, Second child of two, he had an elder, more brilliant sister. Disturbed by discussions between his father and mother (misunderstandings so sharp that it turned into divorce during the child's therapy), he came to me because of stammering.

*Drawing 1.* He drew a dream he had had a few days before. In front of a straw hut there was a man tied to a post. An Indian was roasting him to eat. Another Indian was already seated before a table with knife, fork and plate, ready to begin his meal.

The drawing was pale, almost colorless. The dream was one of anxiety. Bernard had expressed his feeling of helplessness and of fright. He felt himself in a compulsion.

*Drawing 2.* Bernard drew an early memory connected with a visit to a grotto which he had made with his grandfather when he was younger. In a pale green landscape, near the round entrance of the grotto, at the left corner of the page, he showed a tiny person seemingly lost and floating between the sky and a lower brown line representing the earth.

This was an expression of his own actual situation. He lacked any security or contact with anybody; a helpless creature who could not assert himself because he did not stand up firmly.

*Drawing 3.* On a waveless sea (cf. the second drawing of case two) he showed a big warship. Guns were shooting toward the sky and airplanes were throwing bombs. The whole picture was still static, without any visible human being. But a small outburst of courage and a shy manifestation of struggle were to be seen. What was noteworthy was the choice of the subject and the drawing strength compared to the first pale drawings. The awakening of a strong capacity was springing up. It is interesting to note about this stammerer that begin-

ning with this one, each drawing was speaking. From each plane and gun a word came forth surrounded by a zigzag circle, which was a projection of his stammering. The colors were still cold; pale blue, grey, light brown.

*Drawing 4.* This drawing was a continuation of the last and the end of the story of the ship. Bernard told me, "And she sinks." I suggested, using the method to awaken a dream, "Perhaps you can go down and see what happened to the sunken boat." Then he began to draw a submarine scene containing people. The ship sat in the bed of the sea with seaweeds and some big fish about it. There were two men with a harpoon. From a craft on the surface, a fisherman held a line. A little snake went upward toward the horizon. For the first time Bernard used new colors; vivid blue for the sea, and a three-colored flag floating from the mast. He signed his drawing with two big capital letters, a blue one and a red one, being happy for the first time to mark his work and to take a responsibility.

His evolution is to be seen through some details:

- 1) People in movement.
- 2) Aggression—represented by the harpoon-fishing.
- 3) Vivid colors—especially red.

*Drawing 5.* This was the beginning of a series of plane flights inspired by a book of the air-war. He used it as an expression of his mood of aggression. He showed a battle of planes with parachutes on fire. From the cockpit was written the words, "S.O.S. I am dead. Good-bye." In this drawing the lines were strong, even violent, and all done in red and black.

*Drawing 6.* The air battle was stronger. A big airplane in the center bore on its cockpit twenty-seven crosses representing the number of beaten enemies. The pilot said, "I am shooting one down." There were violent long red lines.

*Drawing 7.* This time there was a new form of fighting. He drew a duel between two strangers recognizable by different colored jerseys. I asked, "Is there a boy in your class or in your family whom you do not like?" He answered without hesitation, "Yes, a stranger who bothers me at play-time because he is stronger than I am."

Bernard and I then had a little talk. I pointed out that even if his comrade were stronger physically, there certainly were other possibili-

ties where Bernard could excel. All of a sudden he answered that he himself was a much better pupil than the other in arithmetic. He looked relaxed, and finishing off his drawing, added these words coming from the mouth of his enemy, "I am hurt." He left this consultation in happiness.

*Drawing 8.* At a cross-road there are two vehicles; a taxi-cab on the left side without anyone in it. (His grandfather was a taxi-driver, and it seems to be a symbol of his past.) In the other street, driving toward the right side, there was a big bus with many people. I asked, "Where are you in this drawing? In the taxi or in the bus?" He answered quickly, "In the bus, of course." Taking the pencil, he reinforced the lines of a person looking out of the window and wearing a beautiful hat.

The need for fight seemed to have passed over this time. What was essential for him now was to find his path and his social place. He began a new, more constructive life with others.

*Drawing 9.* In the sky there was a balloon with the name "Victory" on the nacelle. The flyer was harpooning a large animal, perhaps an elephant or rhinoceros. Bernard now had the courage to show that he was able to attack a stronger being.

*Drawing 10.* A big, triumphant plane occupied almost the entire page, flying toward the right side (toward the future, in comparison with his other drawings where planes flew toward the left). Bernard was the pilot standing in the cockpit as a conqueror. At the top, two little planes seemed to be flying away.

The stammer which was the cause for consultation was not mentioned at all during the treatment, but became rarer and rarer and ceased suddenly after his *prise de conscience*, the drawing of the duel. After that time his contacts with others improved.

The emphasis placed on this last case illustrates our thesis on the value of child-drawing in psychotherapy. His drawings helped Bernard toward a better understanding of his difficulties; insecurity, shyness, lack of confidence in his possibilities. Unburdened of his false belief, he realized his real strength and unknown capacities.