Applying Learners' Drawings as Pedagogical Pathways for Enhancing GESI and SEL in Gomoa West District in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the use of learners' drawings as a teaching resource to enhance gender equality, social inclusion (GESI), and social-emotional learning (SEL) in basic schools in the Gomoa West District. The research builds on well-founded theories of child development (Lowenfeld, Piaget and Vygotsky) that aim to overcome the limitations of existing tests, which are verbal and thus do not allow children to communicate feelings and experiences that are difficult to describe verbally. A two-stage qualitative sampling was used and 196 students of six basic schools participated in the drawing activities. Nine detailed cases were selected from this group for closer examination of their narratives. Data was collected through analysing students' artworks, conducting student-led discussions, and making classroom observations and this data was analysed to find common themes. The results indicate that learners' works demonstrate the subtle emotional and social reality, which other instruments such as traditional tests do not capture, such as the persistent absence from school, gender expectations and heavy domestic chores. The study's focus is to use drawings to help teachers target their support, which involves referring more complex cases to child psychologists, rather than relying on drawings to make a diagnosis. Therefore, this study provides a practical and child-centred way for teachers to foster empathy in their students, identify pupils who are at risk of being excluded, and make adaptations to Ghana's Common Core Programme to increase inclusion and support.

Keywords: children's drawings; gender equality and social inclusion; social-emotional learning; child-centred pedagogy; basic schools; Ghana; qualitative research; Common Core Programme

INTRODUCTION

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) are gaining attention in education because of how they promote learners' access to education, relationships with others, and social and emotional well-being (Poed, 2020; McCall et al., 2023). In many countries, education reforms have moved past acknowledging the importance of gender equality and inclusion in policy documents to how these principles can be reflected in what teachers do and learners experience in the classroom (Hossain, 2022; Monkman and Webster, 2014). In Africa, this concern can be seen in the growing work on gender-responsive pedagogy, inclusive teaching practices, school-based programmes, and community participation. Ghana has also incorporated similar concerns into its curriculum reforms. Teachers are expected to apply GESI principles in their teaching and to avoid reinforcing gender and other forms of stereotyping through classroom activities and curriculum content (Mohammed and Hlalele, 2025).

One possible approach to this is for learners to produce drawings. Children do not always find it easy to explain their experiences through speaking or writing. A drawing can give them another way to show what they have experienced, what they think about their surroundings, or how they relate to other people. Yet, despite the diagnostic and aesthetic value of children's drawings, there is still little empirical research in Ghana on how drawings can be used in classroom practice to support GESI and SEL, particularly in the Gomoa West District. Much of the existing research has concentrated on policy implementation, teacher responsiveness, attitudes towards inclusion, and the barriers that affect equitable participation. (Agyena-Karikari, 2023; Ntumi

et al., 2025; Oduro, 2025). Less attention has been given to what teachers can actually do with learners' drawings when they reveal concerns about a learner's social or emotional experience.

This is particularly significant in areas such as the Gomoa West District in Ghana, where children from low-income or vulnerable families are exposed to additional emotional and educational stress (Amoako, 2025). These subtle obstacles to belonging and well-being among girls, those with disabilities, and marginalised young people are not detected by traditional academic testing (Carter et al., 2023). In this context, drawing-based teaching is a viable approach that can offer a culturally appropriate and accessible means of understanding students' lived experiences and fostering empathetic learning environments. The problem addressed by this study can therefore be understood in three related ways. First, little is known about how basic school learners in the Gomoa West District represent and explain experiences connected with their emotions, relationships, gender, and inclusion through drawings. Second, drawings are not widely used in ordinary classroom practice to explore issues connected with GESI and SEL. Third, little is known about learners' explanations that raise concerns requiring assistance beyond the classroom teacher, receiving appropriate professional support from other fields.

The study examines learners' drawings alongside their interpretations of what they have drawn. It also considers how teachers can recognise concerns that may require further support and how professionals can contribute when such concerns are identified. The study explores whether drawing can become a useful part of classroom interaction through which learners can express experiences, teachers can listen more closely, and appropriate support can be provided when needed. The findings may also provide transferable insights for other districts in Ghana and comparable socioeconomic contexts by demonstrating how learner-centred visual pedagogy can be integrated into inclusive educational practice while safeguarding learner voice, ethical interpretation, and appropriate multidisciplinary support.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Education has been identified as a key driver of social justice, equity and sustainable development. It plays a central role in human development in the United Nations 2030 Agenda within the context of Sustainable Development Goal 4: Quality Education, SDG5 – Gender Equality, and SDG10 – Reduced Inequalities (Kix, 2024; United Nations, 2012). Gender equality in education can be understood as a state in which all learners, regardless of gender, have equitable opportunities to access, participate in, and benefit from education, and in which education has a positive impact on their life trajectories (Unterhalter, 2017). This wider lens pays as much attention to who is excluded from educational spaces as to who is included, whose voices are heard, whose stories are told and whether learners are able to engage meaningfully within them (UNESCO, 2020).

In educational contexts, children’s drawings are one way to gain insight into psychological well-being, emotional experiences, and cognitive development (Waters et al., 2022). Visual symbols and features, even when not deliberately intended, may reveal learners’ perceptions of gender roles, inclusion or exclusion, and experiences in home and classroom environments (Alter & Köffler, 2021). As a result, drawings, together with learners’ explanations, can serve as useful entry points for identifying issues related to GESI and SEL. Drawings may illustrate perceived disparities in ability and participation. For example, learners’ drawings may depict boys in sports or in more dominant roles and girls in more domestic or supportive roles, such as in public engagement. When teachers facilitate the process of interpreting learners’ representations and the meanings of their drawings, however, the drawings become meaningful pedagogical tools (Darling-McQuistan, 2017).

An important consideration for understanding the meaning of learners’ drawings lies in the cognitive-developmental theory developed by Jean Piaget. The theorist maintains that human beings construct knowledge individually through interactions with the environment (Piaget, 1952). One engages in the processes of assimilation and accommodation of information into existing cognitive schemas. Therefore, a person’s drawing is a manifestation of their cognitive structure. In the current study, where the drawings of learners are used to promote gender equity and social-emotional learning (GESI/SEL), Piaget’s theory can be used to interpret the meanings of learners’ depictions of power, dominance, subordination, gender stereotypes,

and exclusion. However, the limitations of Piaget's framework should also be acknowledged. Namely, the theory is limited to individual differences as dictated by cognitive structures. Learners' drawings reflect only their cognitive development without considering environmental factors such as gender, religion, or familial backgrounds.

Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory offers an excellent framework for interpreting learners' drawings in relation to GESI and SEL in Gomoa West. This theory highlights the importance of social interaction and stresses that learning occurs through mutual interaction, and knowledge is constructed and then incorporated into the learner (Vygotsky, 1978).Therefore, based on this theory, an artwork created by a learner is expected to depict the kind of life that people lead in their community or society. This emphasis on social influences is too broad and doesn't take into account the variability of individual children or how children may misread social norms. Yet another limitation is the lack of clear definitions of developmental level and developmental stage.

Lowenfeld's (1947) theory focuses on the features of artistic development, which are grouped into distinct stages, each of which represents specific aspects of drawing creation. At the schematic stage, children are able to create more structured drawings using schematic constructs (Lowenfeld, 1947). Dawning realism is the last stage of children's drawing development, which begins at age nine and ends at age twelve (Lowenfeld, 1947). At this stage, children are able to create realistic images that reflect their environment in all its details. The main limitation of Lowenfeld's approach to interpreting children's drawings is the potential imposition of strict hierarchical divisions on kids' artistic development. Together, these perspectives prevent the study from reducing drawings either to individual cognitive products or to direct reflections of social reality. Learners' drawings are instead understood as developmentally situated, socially mediated representations whose meanings require explanation by the learner and interpretation within context.

In order to support the holistic development of learners, art education makes use of various pedagogical techniques that promote creativity, critical thinking, self-expression, and collaboration (Sattar et al., 2025). First of all, one can speak about the concept of learner-centered art pedagogy that views children as constructors and interpreters of artistic meaning (Olalere, 2018). Instead of controlling the artistic results, the teacher becomes the facilitator that allows learners to experiment, express themselves and make reflections. Collaborative art pedagogy builds knowledge through the interaction of students, teachers and wider community in art-making. Art works that emerge within the framework of joint projects, peer critiques and collective problem-solving allow children to learn how to empathize, communicate, and respect the point of view of others. Building upon these ideas, arts-based pedagogy involves the integration of creative mediums into the processes of general teaching and learning in order to reflect and express oneself (Leavy, 2020). The activities such as drawing, painting, sculpting, collage making and drama become alternative ways to demonstrate knowledge, feelings and discuss social issues.

After a teacher has guided the interview process of understanding learners drawing, multidisciplinary is needed for concerns that exceed the repertoire of the teacher. A multidisciplinary approach can strengthen teachers' capacity to respond appropriately to concerns emerging from learners' drawings and their accompanying explanations. Although art educators possess expertise in visual literacy, artistic expression, and classroom-based art practices, concerns relating to learners' emotional well-being, gender relations, disability, social relationships, and participation may require knowledge from complementary fields such as psychology, inclusive education, and sociocultural studies (Darbellay, 2024). Child psychologists can provide additional support for learners whose drawings and other forms of artistic expression raise concerns that go beyond what a classroom teacher is professionally trained to address (Eklund et al., 2020). Their role is not to interpret a child's drawing on its own or attach psychological meanings to particular visual symbols. Instead, their involvement becomes relevant when the learner has explained the drawing and the explanation, together with the teacher's observations, points to emotional, behavioural, developmental, or psychosocial concerns that may require their attention (Malchiodi, 2012; Wright, 2010). In this way, child psychologists can support learner wellbeing while recognising that children themselves should have an opportunity to explain what their drawings mean.

Social Justice Education Framework will offers a lens for promoting social justice, equity and fairness in

educational settings. It advises teachers on how to develop inclusive learning spaces which are explicitly reflective of and challenge systemic inequalities in learning and teaching. A central theme in this framework is the analysis of the social construction and historical evolution of political, institutional and pedagogical practices that are perpetuating inequality. These are made visible and the framework invites transformative action to challenge and break unequal systems (Carlisle et al, 2006). The three components of the Social Justice Education Framework in this study are: anti-bias education, equity-minded teaching and learning, and a stance of inclusivity and respect for diversity. Furthermore, Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is also woven into the curriculum as a complementary pedagogical approach to complementing the process of internalisation and lived experience of social justice principles.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed an action research design in an interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative research approach. The design was appropriate because it aimed not only to uncover how learners' drawings (alongside their explanations) clarified GESI and SEL issues, but also to provide guidance for classroom practice that was actionable. The planning, action, observation, reflection cycle of action research is well suited to improve the practice of education, as it is a process of iteration (Kemmis et al., 2014).

The study was carried out in the Gomoa West District of the Central Region, Ghana, in six selected public, private, and special basic schools. The choice of the District was made because the schools provided a variety of learning experiences to explore learners' experiences of gender, inclusion, relationships, and emotional well-being. Including public, private, and special schools allowed for the examination of how learners' experiences could differ in these settings. Basic Four learners between the ages of 9 and 12 years were selected because they were considered capable of communicating their experiences from drawing and were able to talk about what they had produced. Lowenfeld's work on children's artistic development provides a useful foundation for understanding children within this age range. Participant selection consisted of two stages. At the first stage, all 196 learners in the six selected classes from the six Basic Schools participated in the initial drawing exercise. The second stage involved selecting 9 learners for closer analysis. Learner selection was based primarily on the richness and relevance of their explanations of the drawings. The number of learners with specialist concerns identified during analysis was 3 out of the 9 learners who were later referred. These were not only derived from the drawings, but were a result of viewing the drawings with reference to the learners' explanations, observations during the lesson, and other information collected during the study. The three learners, however, were not included as a sample, but were included in the original sample of 9, and the specialist support provided to them was included in the following phase of the action research – the intervention.

Under the interpretivist paradigm and action research design used in this study, data were generated through four complementary instruments: learners' drawings, semi-structured interviews, classroom observation and field notes (Elbardan & Kholeif, 2017). These instruments were purposively selected for their capacity to capture Basic Four learners' meaning-making regarding Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), while aligning with the iterative and reflective nature of action research. The study had ethical considerations because it involved children and aimed to understand their lived experience through drawings and interviews (Sun et al., 2023). The research was guided by the principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice in addition to ethical guidelines for educational research (Raina, 2024).

Data collection followed the cyclical action-research processes of planning, action, observation, and reflection across seven sequential stages. Initial drawings and semi-structured interviews with 196 learners identified experiences related to GESI and SEL, from which 9 information-rich cases were purposively selected. These findings informed a drawing-based classroom intervention, during which learners' participation, behaviour, and interactions were observed. Post-intervention drawings, interviews, and observations were subsequently used to assess changes, while three learners requiring specialist support were referred to a child psychologist with parental consent. Data from drawings, interviews, observations, and clinical follow-up were triangulated to evaluate the interventions and strengthen the credibility of the findings.

First, drawings were created by learners, and their explanations were given via interviews, and these explanations were the basis for the interpretation (Fiorella & Kuhlmann, 2020). Second, learners' narratives were triangulated with observation notes, interviews, and field notes in the classroom to identify GESI- and SEL-related concerns. Where appropriate, learners were referred to a registered child psychologist following the established referral protocol for specialist intervention, while the researcher retained responsibility for interpretation, coordination, and follow-up. Third, pedagogical interventions and specialist recommendations were implemented, followed by post-intervention observations and reflection to examine changes in learners' behaviour, participation, peer relationships, and classroom engagement (Sedova et al, 2025).

Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, which was employed in line with the action research design and interpretivist paradigm (Terry & Hayfield, 2021). Analysis was done in an iterative fashion with the data collection, and insights gained from the analysis guided the next steps in the study. The emphasis was on understanding the meaning(s) of learners' drawings rather than finding statistical generalisations.The trustworthiness of this interpretivist study was achieved by employing Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of qualitative research.

FINDINGS

The findings presented in this article focus exclusively on how learners' drawings functioned as pedagogical pathways for strengthening GESI and SEL, and how interpreting drawings informed multidisciplinary support for learner-specific challenges. The evidence is organised around the classroom representations and post-drawing accounts of learners, followed by the interventions implemented and the changes observed after the intervention. It is however important to note that, the findings should be understood within the interpretivist and action research orientation of the study and are not intended for statistical generalisation. The drawings should be interpreted in conjunction with learners' explanations and other sources of evidence, and should not be used independently to make psychological or diagnostic judgements. Where concerns extended beyond the teacher's professional role, appropriate referral to a registered child psychologist were made with parental consent. Learners' drawings were interpreted alongside their explanations, semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and field notes. Learners' own explanations provided essential context for understanding what they intended to represent, what the representation meant to them and how it related to their classroom and social experiences. Their verbal and non-verbal responses were therefore treated as important sources of interpretation.

Drawings as Pedagogical Pathways for GESI and SEL

The findings show that learners' drawings served two closely connected classroom functions. First, they provided a child-friendly, participatory way to identify concerns related to gender inequality, exclusion, discrimination, low confidence, peer conflict, and emotional difficulty. Second, the drawings became learner-generated instructional resources through which teachers could initiate activities on identity, relationships, participation, belonging, empathy and equitable participation.

Using Learners' Drawings to Identify GESI and SEL Issues and Inform Corrective Intervention

The drawings revealed patterns of peer affiliation and selective inclusion or exclusion that were not fully apparent from routine classroom observation. In Naa's drawing, the three female learners represented herself and two best female classmates, while the male figure represented her younger brother. Her account showed that interaction with boys occurred sometimes, but not consistently. The learner's body language during the interview also indicated that she did not wish to elaborate further, and the interview was therefore terminated without prolonged questioning.

Afia's drawing contained a female teacher and three learners but no male classmate. When asked about the omission, she firmly explained that she did not play with boys and that interaction with her brothers at home was only occasional. Her quiet return to her seat after a classmate confirmed that she generally did not play with boys reinforced the finding that the drawing reflected a limited pattern of cross-gender peer interaction. Aba's drawing presented the opposite pattern. She intentionally depicted only boys because they were the

classmates with whom she interacted most frequently. She explained that she often played football with them during break periods and preferred their company because of shared interests. The removal of the name "Mary" from beneath one figure further indicated her awareness of who belonged to her usual social group. Across these cases, selective representation of peers provided evidence of gendered interaction, affiliation and possible discomfort with cross-gender relationships. The drawings therefore exposed areas requiring responsive classroom intervention, particularly opportunities for respectful interaction, collaborative work and inclusive participation across genders.



Figure 1



Figure 2

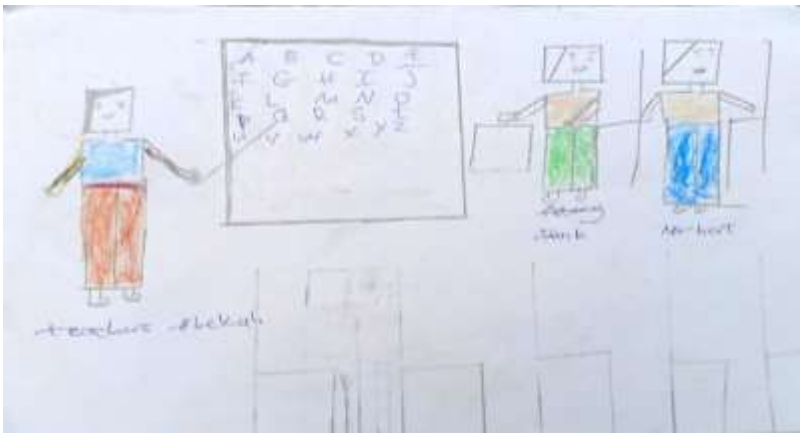


Figure 3

Figure 1: Naa's drawing illustrates peer affiliation and classroom social relationships.

Figure 2: Afia's drawing illustrates gender-based peer affiliation within the classroom.

Figure 3: Aba's drawing illustrating cross-gender peer affiliation in the classroom.

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork (2026)

Learners' Drawings as Instructional Resources for Enhancing GESI and SEL

Learners drawings could move from being representations of learners' experiences to becoming instructional resources used directly within classroom practice. Learners actively represented, explored and reflected on issues concerning classroom organisation, gender, relationships, participation and aspirations. The resulting artworks provided concrete material for teacher-guided classroom activities.

Nii's drawing represented the entire class through one boy and one girl. Although substantial drawing space remained unoccupied, he explained that there were twenty-five learners in his class and that it would have been difficult to draw everyone. He therefore used two learners to represent the two genders. The teacher's

attempts to encourage the inclusion of additional figures did not alter his decision, as he continued working after offering a gentle smile. The finding demonstrated that a learner's apparently simple representation could carry a deliberate idea about classroom membership. Nii's drawing could consequently be used to initiate classroom activities on representation, belonging and whose identities are included in classroom learning. The drawing created an opportunity for learners to express and examine their understanding of inclusion through a familiar classroom setting. Ali's drawing focused on the organisation and relationships of learners rather than the physical structure of the classroom. Ten figures were drawn in two rows, five boys and five girls. Ali stated that the figures represent the seating arrangement, and that each pair represents a boy and a girl sharing a desk as they sit in class. Although they were drawn standing, the learner interpreted them as seated, as he was unable to draw seated figures. The interpretation therefore emphasised shared space, peer relationships, and the organisation of learners. The balanced arrangement of boys and girls and the depiction of learners holding hands provided material for classroom activities concerning cooperation, shared spaces, equitable participation and respectful interaction. The drawing could be displayed as a classroom poster and used to guide structured activities in which learners work together towards common goals.

Dzifa's drawing extended the classroom into the playground and combined two personally meaningful aspects of school life: classroom learning and football. The classroom scene showed a teacher teaching learners, while the football scene included two girls and two boys in an active sporting setting. The football field was enclosed by two goal posts with nets, and one goalpost already had a football. During the interview, Dzifa explained that the football scene was based on her participation in soccer. She desired for the girls to defeat the boys, and her ambition to become a footballer. She confidently reported that the girls were leading by one goal and were determined to score again. The playground scene therefore represented more than a physical extension of the classroom; it incorporated her experience, confidence, competitive interest and aspiration. Taken together, the findings show that the drawings served both an interpretive and an instructional function. As interpretive resources, they brought attention to gendered affiliation, exclusion and social-emotional positioning. As instructional resources, they supported classroom engagement with identity, relationships, participation, cooperation and aspirations.



Figure 4



Figure 5

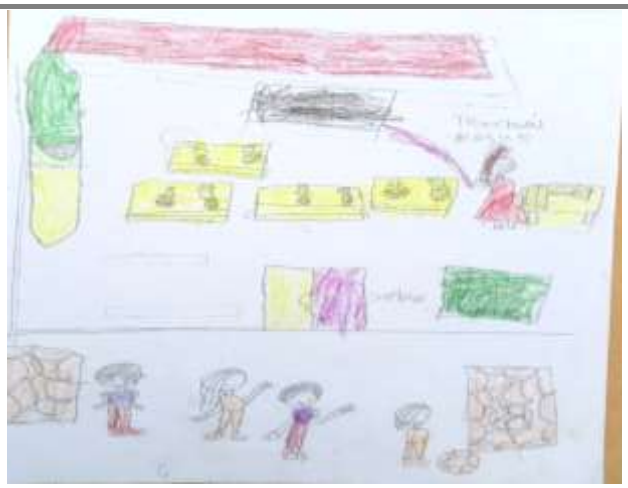


Figure 6

Figure 4: Nii's drawing illustrates a symbolic representation of gender inclusion in classroom learning

Figure 5: Ali's drawing illustrates a gender-inclusive seating arrangement as an instructional resource for promoting GESI and SEL.

Figure 6: Dzifa's drawing illustrates gender-inclusive participation in classroom learning and a football match

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork (2026)

Multidisciplinary Interpretation and Support

The findings under Research Question Three focused on the use of a multidisciplinary support framework to interpret drawings, identify learner-specific challenges and facilitate appropriate interventions. Three cases, Osei, Adepa and Otoo, illustrated learning vulnerability, peer conflict, emotional attachment and challenges in teacher–learner interaction.

Interpretation of Drawings to Identify Learner-Specific Concerns

The findings showed that drawings constituted an important source of classroom-based evidence, but their meanings became clearer when learners explained their own representations. Post-drawing interviews and teacher reflections revealed concerns relating to participation, inclusion, peer relationships, emotional wellbeing, discrimination, classroom belonging and learning.

Osei's drawing presented a classroom with a teacher, a learner, a cupboard, a desk, windows, a door, a tree, the sun and the Ghanaian flag. The teacher appeared larger and more distinct than the learner. Osei could say only that he had drawn his teacher and himself. He was described as requiring additional support, arriving late and often lacking learning materials. Nevertheless, completing the drawing was regarded by his teacher as evidence of progress beyond his usual classroom performance. During interpretation, Osei displayed a quiet and cautious disposition, responding after noticeable pauses and carefully selecting his words. The interview was concluded without prolonged questioning.

Adepa's drawing presented a predominantly female group and included her younger brother. Her account linked the representation to recurring confrontations with boys whom she said provoked or disturbed her and her brother. She therefore excluded male learners from her class representation. Teacher observations indicated that the pattern of response extended across the classroom and the school bus and occurred every day. Adepa maintained that she would defend herself and her younger brother physically whenever threatened by a boy inside or outside the school walls.

Otoo's drawing presented a simplified classroom with a male teacher, a whiteboard and ten learner desks. The whiteboard carried the instruction to draw what the learner saw when Madam was teaching, yet Otoo represented a former male teacher rather than the current female teacher. The drawing revealed a strong emotional attachment to the former teacher and a preference for the learning experiences associated with that relationship.

Across the three cases, the drawings revealed different learner-specific concerns. Osei's case involved learning difficulties and the need for further academic support. Adepa's case involved repeated peer difficulties and physical reactions to perceived provocation. Otoo's case involved emotional and relational influences affecting classroom engagement. The findings established the need for post-drawing interviews and teacher reflection before decisions about support were made.



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

Figure 7. Osei's drawing illustrating differentiated instructional support within the classroom.

Figure 8. Adepa's drawing illustrating classroom relationships and behaviour management practices.

Figure 9. Otoo's Drawing Illustrating Dysfunctional Teacher–Learner Relations

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork (2026)

Psychological Hypotheses, Interventions and Post-Intervention Reflections

The child psychologist used learners' visual representations, verbal explanations and relevant contextual information to develop working hypotheses concerning emotional, behavioural, interpersonal and developmental concerns. The drawings were used as elicitation and communication tools rather than as diagnostic tools. The resulting support responses included classroom strategies, counselling, family engagement, peer support and differentiated instruction.

Osei: Academic Vulnerability and Communicative Insecurity

Osei's drawing and interview responses indicated reduced academic self-efficacy and hesitant social interaction. Chronic lateness, restricted access to learning materials and slower mastery of concepts suggested cumulative learning disadvantage affecting confidence and participation. His organised classroom representation nevertheless showed continuing psychological investment in schooling. The working hypothesis centred on academic vulnerability and communicative insecurity rather than lack of motivation. Intervention involved differentiated instruction, scaffolding, sufficient processing time, reinforcement of effort and progress, supported participation, and home-school attention to punctuality, attendance, learning resources and continuity of routines. Following implementation, Osei became more punctual, attended school consistently and submitted work for marking and correction. Although he remained slow to respond, he showed greater willingness to participate and used more break time to complete notes and corrections.

Adepa: Emotional Regulation and Adaptive Conflict Management

Adepa's visual narrative and interview responses indicated ongoing dysregulation in peer relationships, particularly with male peers. Her physical confrontation was understood within the case as a protective response to perceived threats. The working hypothesis centred on emotional regulation and adaptive conflict management. Intervention focused on emotional awareness, impulse control, perspective taking, reflective decision-making, respectful peer relationships and non-violent conflict resolution. Cooperative activities, restorative classroom practices and consistent behavioural expectations were incorporated, alongside caregiver support. After intervention, Adepa became calmer, more self-controlled and more focused on classroom activities. She continued to interact more frequently with girls but communicated increasingly appropriately with boys and reported resisting the impulse to fight. She participated more comfortably with both groups, while teachers reported fewer peer-conflict complaints.

Otoo: Teacher–Learner Relationship and Classroom Engagement

Otoo's representation of a former male teacher highlighted the enduring impact of an emotionally significant relationship on school motivation and engagement. The working hypothesis linked his lack of engagement to disconnection in the teacher–learner relationship and difficulty adapting to the new relationship, rather than academic inability or behavioural resistance. Support focused on establishing safe and supportive relationships with trusted adults, processing attachment to the former teacher, consistent positive interaction, individual encouragement and emotionally safe instructional practices. The intervention involved the teacher, parent, child psychologist and researcher. The teacher contributed observation, encouragement and relationship-building; the parent reinforced support at home; the psychologist guided behavioural interpretation and planning; and the researcher monitored implementation. A discreet short-term welfare measure addressed immediate financial difficulty, while relational, educational and psychological support continued throughout the month-long intervention. Subsequent observations showed that Otoo increasingly approached his teacher, reported maltreatment, participated more actively and interacted with adults more confidently. These improvements continued after the welfare support ended.

Across the three cases, the implemented interventions addressed learning vulnerability, emotional regulation, peer conflict, teacher–learner relationships and socioeconomic barriers through coordinated, context-responsive support involving learners, teachers, families, the child psychologist and the researcher.

CONCLUSION

The findings establish that learners' drawings can serve as meaningful pedagogical pathways for strengthening GESI and SEL in basic school classrooms. Drawings provided a child-friendly means of identifying concerns relating to gender, exclusion, discrimination, confidence, peer relationships, participation and emotional wellbeing, while also serving as learner-generated resources for initiating classroom discussions on identity, empathy, belonging, cooperation and equitable participation.

The study further concludes that the meaning of learners' drawings cannot be determined from visual features alone. Learners' explanations, interviews, classroom observations and field notes were essential for developing a fuller understanding of their experiences. The cases of Naa, Afia, Aba, Nii, Ali and Dzifa demonstrated how drawings could stimulate discussions about inclusion, representation, relationships, participation and confidence. Similarly, the experiences of Osei, Adepa and Otoo showed that drawings could help reveal learner-specific academic, emotional and interpersonal concerns when interpreted alongside other sources of evidence.

The multidisciplinary support framework also provided an important pathway for addressing concerns that extended beyond the classroom teacher's professional role. Drawings were used as elicitation and communication tools rather than diagnostic instruments, with appropriate support involving teachers, parents, counsellors, psychologists and other relevant professionals. Following intervention, positive changes were observed in areas such as school attendance, responsibility, emotional regulation, peer interaction, conflict management, participation and confidence.

Overall, the study concludes that the integration of learners' drawings into classroom practice can promote reflective dialogue, strengthen attention to learners' voices and experiences, and support more inclusive and socially and emotionally responsive classrooms. The pathway of representation, explanation, observation, intervention and evaluation provides a practical approach through which drawings can contribute to GESI and SEL.

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