

A Case Study of Therapeutic Process Autistic Children As Performing Art In Indonesia

Muchammad Bayu Tejo Sampurno
 Universitas Negeri Surabaya
 Surabaya, Indonesia
 m.bayutejo@gmail.com

Abstract—Children with autism are children who have communication problems that make them isolated from their environment. Art, has flexibility in the delivery of communication through the symbols that are in it. This makes art appear as one of the media communication options for children with autism. In its relation with other disciplines, any methods of healing or therapy are collaborating with art. This study discusses how to see the autistic child's therapy process as a show that can be enjoyed aesthetically and artistically. This study uses practice-led research and ethnography approach. The study was conducted on single case, R, children with autism in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The results showed that the identification of aesthetic and artistic aspects that can be used as a reference to see the therapeutic process as performing art can also improve communication and memory skills in children with autism. In addition, the therapeutic process seen as the performing arts can increase the confidence of both children with autism, their families, and their audience. It is expected that there will be an integrated therapy process that can be a new therapy model to improve the quality of life of children with autism.

Keywords— *therapeutic, autism, children, performance, art*

I. INTRODUCTION

Autism is a complex communication disorder that causes a person to be impressed with life in his own world. Studies related to autism are now quite a lot starting from Malchiodi and Judith Aron Rubin with they famous work on art therapy [1]–[6], but the study of the role of art for children with autism, especially in Indonesia is not familiar. I assumed that raised this issue was when I as an art student saw that art had high flexibility to enter into other disciplines. Art in the realm of health, can act as a medicine or healing medium in this case is a therapeutic medium.

Art as a medium of therapy, can be used as a primary medium for healing, especially in patients who have trauma [6]. In other situations, art therapy may be used as an adjunct to treatment, to enhance verbal therapy through working with the client to increase self-understanding and insight [6]. For still others, art expression may be a way to reach those whose problems have not been revealed solely through talking about them. Drawing, painting, collage, or simple sculpture may be the modalities through which a child expresses an abusive experience for the first time, an adult uncovers a forgotten trauma, or a family discloses a previously hidden secret or significant incident.

Art therapy supports the belief that all individuals have the capacity to express themselves creatively and that the

product is less important than the therapeutic process involved. The therapist's focus is not specifically on the aesthetic merits of art making but on the therapeutic needs of the person to express.

Autism is in the spectrum of disorders called Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). This disorder category is classified through the Diagnostic and Statistics Manual (DSM) under the Pervasive Developmental Disorder label, which includes autism diagnosis, Asperger's syndrome, and otherwise Specified Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD-NOS). Together, they represent a category of disorders characterized by thinking rigidity, lack of emotional influence, and sensory processing disturbances. DSM-IV-TR defines autism disorder as a disorder or abnormality of social and communication interactions, as well as limited activities and interests [7]. Therefore, communication is the main disorder in autism, which makes it isolated from the environment and seems to have a world of its own.

Autism was almost simultaneously mentioned in 1940 by Leo Kanner in the United States and Hans Asperger in Austria [8]. Both use the word "autism" to describe the condition with a label first used by psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler in 1911 to describe aspects of schizophrenia [9]. This refers to the reduction of relationships to people and the outside world to the extreme that excludes the surrounding environment except oneself. This reduction or isolation can be described as a withdrawal from social life into the self, according to the word 'autistic' and 'autism' which comes from the word *autos* (Greek) which means "self" [9].

The World Health Organization (WHO) on its official website states 1: 160 children in the world have autism disorders (accessed on July 3, 2018), where in the early 2000s the prevalence was around 1: 1000 births, then research in 2008 showed an increase of up to 1, 68: 1000 births. This fact shows that people with autism increase from year to year. Research related to autism treatment continues to be carried out, ranging from the use of drugs, therapeutic models such as Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), Developmental, Individual Differences, Relationship-Based Approach (DIR), occupational therapy, sensory-integration therapy, speech therapy, art therapy, and The Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS). For this study, I focused on art therapy as a creative therapeutic model for children with autism. The goal is to help improve the verbal communication skills of autistic children through the process of painting.

With regard to art, basically autistic children also love arts. Autistic children who are still in the category of 'children' make art like other children in general, namely a 'nature'. This is because art has aspects that are very close to the world of children, namely aspects of play in which there is a pleasant nature.

In the process of art therapy there is a creative process that is performed by children both consciously and unconsciously. The creative process is a key point that can be the next assessment in the therapy process. In addition, key points when the creative process is also an aesthetic show because it shows the element of pure beauty. From the creative process in which there are therapeutic actions, artistic paintings will be produced. This study tries to see the artistic identity and expression of the creative process and painting of autistic children, as a complexity of therapy to improve the communication skills of autistic children. The continuous role between therapists, autistic children, art media and everything that supports them, has an important influence in this art therapeutic process.

II. METHODS

Sampling using a single case method with spatial limitations in Yogyakarta, then R (8 years) was chosen as the subject of the study. R was chosen because it has unique attributes as children with autism, namely an indication as gifted disynchronie with autism disorders. Data collection is done by observation, interviews, and documentation studies. Observation focuses on R behavior when at home, school and the surrounding environment. Observation results indicate that R does not show eye contact at all to the person he just met. For aspects of environmental adaptation, R does not indicate a disturbing disturbance to the surrounding environment and the environment he just visited. R is able to control his emotional side and look calm. R will show tantrum symptoms when the object he likes is taken. Observation results are used as initial capital to design instruments for creative behavior processes that refer to the stage of child development and the periodic painting of children by Cathy Malchiodi. Interviews are conducted with parents and teacher R, to know in depth the behavior of R from the perspective of others. Documentation study was carried out with a study of the development of education R, its health report, and the results of paintings made by R.

Data analysis in this study uses narrative interpretation. The researcher looks at R's behavior and life through his artwork. Robert Coles said that the method for understanding is seeing, doing activities together, feeling, and writing them on paper [10]. By observing R in detail and specifically in a few months, listening and asking questions, and relating to the results of his work, can be understood and understood the identity, meaning and artistic value of R and its characteristics. Interaction with R is able to help see the R pattern in interpreting his life. Clara Park says that describing autistic children and their lives must be anecdotal, because without such anecdotes there are words but not experiences [11].

III. ART THERAPY: AN UNSEEN PERFORMANCE

Art appears with its flexibility as a method of therapy. Art therapy is different from teaching art or educating art. Art

therapists use clinical interventions to strengthen and expand artistic activities for children with special needs by focusing on therapeutic goals. The position of the art creation process is more important than the product in art therapy. Art therapists do not focus on techniques in art or provide aesthetic knowledge to children. Through an understanding of children's psychological behaviors and attributes, art therapeutic action plans are designed to improve children's abilities, both in cognition, affection, and psychomotor. In this regard, art therapists work with people with autism to improve cooperation, interaction with the environment, as well as body awareness and coordination. The aim of art therapy is to create symbols in works of art, which serve as a tool to process hidden thoughts and feelings [12]. Art therapists are trained in art therapy activities, both structured and unstructured, which are developed for 'unique' problems of each individual. Art enhances abstract thinking skills, and non-verbal and verbal communication for students diagnosed with autism [13]. Art education and art therapy use various materials and modalities that can help autism students to organize, process, and coordinate their too many or less stimulated experiences [13].

Art as a child psychotherapy was discussed by Gross and Haynes who introduced the application of art therapy to children in the Handbook of Art Therapy [6]. For children in general, artistic expression has become a natural language that children have and can be a valuable asset in expressing trauma, sadness, or other traumatic events. Children either with autism or not, have difficulty expressing their problems or disorders, and art is one of the media for children to communicate non-verbally. Gross and Haynes in the Handbook of Art Therapy [6], reveal several reasons why artistic expression can be used in children's therapy, namely (1) art can reduce anxiety and help children feel more comfortable with therapists, because of the role a therapist is more appropriately referred to as an 'intermediary' not as a 'healer' who is a mediator between the patient and the memory stored in the child as a patient, then brings the two together so that the method or method can be determined so that the memory stored in the patient's mind can be revealed. is intended to be able to decide further actions as a step of healing with the right media; (2) the art of improving memory (memory); (3) the art of training children in storytelling (narrative) because basically art (in this discussion is drawing) is used as a way to open, to help children construct trauma in a narrative while helping them to remember traumatic events; and (4) art can encourage children to tell more clearly when compared to telling stories verbally. In art as a medium of therapy there are terms of reframing and reexposure. Reframing is a way of thinking looking for creative alternatives to see a problem more than one point of view, from various perspectives, so as to allow the problem not to become a burden. Re-exposure is opening or unpacking, by bringing their experience back into consciousness, so that they can guide them more regularly because reopening trauma experiences to victims is a major component in the trauma intervention process. Both traumatic and non-memory, are always taken in everyday life. Therefore there is a need for placement so that this memory is placed in the right place. The purpose of the overall disclosure is to create a fragment of a traumatic event that has been experienced, to separate it from its effects on everyday behavior that may not be in accordance with the experience

that is currently being passed. This is important for children with autism, because negative memories have the opportunity to close or limit their potential, and the simple form is difficult to communicate.

Finally, it can be concluded that everything returns to the function of art for children, namely as a medium of expression of feelings, communication, play, and understanding. The function of art therapy is to help children to get out the problems they experience, and to know the right method for recovery of child problems. The narrative of the work of the child comes from their experience, which is able to interpret their lives into personal meaning [14], and as Kellman say "It is as conveyers and constructors of meaning that narrative and art play their most important roles, for it is through images and words that children inform themselves of how their world is put together, how they must interact with it, and what is of consequence in their lives" [15].

In other words, works of art are made only as a moderation between therapist and child. When the process of moving from the mind into the form of painting, the child's mind is controlled by the subconscious. Problems or traumatic situations experienced by children are expressed in symbols that represent what they want, what they see, and what they think. From these symbols can be detected traumatic events experienced by children. When working with children and expressing their art, the therapist needs to pay attention to entering the child's world, seeing with their vision and perceptions, so that the therapist is able to truly understand what the child represents in his painting.

This research offers 'empathy space' as a therapeutic space. This empathy room is derived from the interpretation of the phenomenon of 'rehabilitation rehabilitation' with a synaesthetic and multisensory perspective. Integrated learning occurs as an effort to treat autistic children. Integrated Learning (IL) is one of the learning models that can have a significant influence on children, especially increasing children's imagination which is the capital for developing children's creativity. In the space of empathy, interactions between therapists, children with autism, and art are the focus of therapeutic processes. The interaction of therapists and children with autism is manifested in works of art that define the cosmic space of an autistic child. This thinking is supported by the concept of Winnicott about space, namely (1) Psychotherapy occurs in overlapping of two playing fields, namely the patient and therapist. Psychotherapy is connected from two people who play together [16], and (2) psychoanalysis has been developed as a very special form of play in the form of communication with yourself, others, and the surrounding environment [16].

A similar argument is expressed by Loewald who calls patients and analysts (children of autism and therapists) as co-authors and co-actors of plays made in therapeutic sessions [17], and Schafer who describes various narrative forms in psychoanalysis as works made together by therapists and autistic children, each of whom tells someone in a unique way [18]. However, without guidance and harmonious relationships from the therapist and the surrounding environment (including the media), autistic children will not be able to communicate their feelings through artwork.

There is harmonious empathy and aesthetic space because these two things are related to sensory perception. As a

branch of the philosophy of art, aesthetics have historically answered the question of what constitutes beauty in art. In this search, to define beauty is the formal aspect of the art object. Many art therapists, in an effort to distance themselves from elitism and judgment have ignored aesthetic considerations and instead put children at the age of five able to manipulate symbols by using different media to express their feelings and ideas. Humans have three systems - making, perceiving, and feeling - from birth and throughout their life span [19]. 'Make' includes actions that are the behavior of an organism. After someone can master the action, the creation system tends to link actions into the order. Over time, relatively separate actions can become organized structures because mental operations depend on the appropriate motivation and conditions for developing skills. The perception system allows an individual to differentiate or distinguish the external environment and allow phenomena to become part of their internal tendencies gradually. The feeling system is produced from the experience of the human senses and allows them to illustrate emotions with behavior. Behavioral patterns are influenced by the interaction and reciprocity that artists use in their roles as creators, critics and audiences. A person can distinguish his feelings from the social context and reflexes in his behavior. Artists express their feelings through their artwork. In turn, the artwork evokes communication because the audience feels the taksu of the artwork. Therefore, feeling is an important component of artistic development. At that time, the sensing system changed to preferential perception, the structure of the making system developed complex schemes and then creative behavior.

Autistic therapists and children can position themselves as performing artists (actors), and convert therapeutic actions into a theatrical performance. In accordance with the opinion of Hamilton who said that theatrical performances can be seen through a variety of actions, provided there is a relationship of expression and emotion of the actor and it is captured by the audience [20]. In the process of art, the expression of autistic children is illustrated through various aspects. Expressions are displayed in a tangible way through symbolic movements that make them embody with painting media as an aesthetic expression. Furthermore expression is also expressed implied through symbolization through scratches and brush strokes on the painting media of autistic children. In the empathy room that is the stage of the show, they are given complete freedom to express what they feel without any limits. Autistic children are positioned as artists who have the authority to do what they want, but remain on the therapist's supervision. This shows that they (therapists and autistic children) are performers in therapeutic performances. They synergistically show their expression according to their respective roles.

IV. CONCLUSION

Art for autistic children is also capable of removing the potential possessed by children. Children with autism as they are known as "children with special needs" must have special potential as well, but may not be seen about their potential. At the time of art, all children's thoughts and feelings will be active, even the child's mind will mix with the child's feelings. Thoughts processed in such a way will become an idea expressed in artwork. Most autistic children who live in

a repetitive world, and make the child seem to live like a robot, without innovation and without imagination. Autistic children are given education about memory that always refers to experience as an essential element in expressing their ideas and ideas. Beauty can be known through experience, and is formed by experience by imagining something. Experience in art is categorized into two types, namely artistic experience (act of production) and aesthetic experience (perception and enjoyment). This experience is felt by autistic children when performing artistic activities called creative processes. In the creative process, all children's thoughts and feelings will be active, so that it can be interpreted by all the senses that children have to be active and finally poured into the form of art. Artwork produced by autistic children may not be many who know the purpose and purpose, but if we look at the meaning of the work it cannot be analyzed instantly. The thing that needs to be emphasized is when art works, children with autism are not hindered by various definitions or conceptions of what ideas and ideas they want to convey. Of course the work produced will be different from today's 'modern' children who seem stiff and afraid to try new things because they are too concerned with the definition and concept of an object. Indirectly the spontaneity possessed by autistic children in their work can produce artistic work because of the potential for a lot of pouring in the form of new symbols in the work. Therefore, they have an original identity, which makes their work full of artistic value. With in-depth analysis and studies, children with autism have a high level of creativity, of course with guidance from parents, teachers and therapists which can be applied in various fields. By understanding these characteristics and potential, a therapist is helped in correcting the difficulties experienced and can explore the potential that has been covered by spectrum disorders.

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