

Lifestyle Assessment in Adlerian Play Therapy:

Kinetic School Drawings in Taiwan

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Abstract

Kinetic School Drawings (KSD) is viewed a developmentally appropriate and valuable tool for exploring children's life tasks during the lifestyle assessment phase of Adlerian play therapy (Kottman & Meany-Walen, 2016). This qualitative study examined the experiences of four school counselors-in-training in Taiwan implementing KSD into their practice with elementary-aged students. Analysis of semi-structured interviews, three major themes emerged: (a) enhanced understanding of students' school experiences and lifestyles, (b) challenges in the implementation process, and (c) recommendations for developing culturally appropriate guidelines and lifestyle interview questions. Specifically, participants reported that KSD allowed them to gain insights into students' functioning across cognitive, emotional, behavioral, relational, and self-concept domains. The drawings served as an accessible and expressive medium for children to communicate their perceptions of school life, teacher relationships, peer interactions, and personal strengths or struggles. Participants also noted the importance of building strong therapeutic rapport, setting clear expectations, and integrating KSD with additional assessment data to ensure well-rounded interpretations. Findings support the development of culturally affirming implementation materials and training to guide counselors in the effective use of KSD in Adlerian play therapy. Implications for cross-cultural adaptation and future research directions are discussed.

Research Background

Drawing is a product of the interaction between the artist's perception of the world, past experiences, and the intention to present something to the viewer (Fan et al., 2023). For children, expressing themselves through drawings is both a direct and natural form of communication. Studies have shown that drawings can serve as an assessment tool in child counseling, enabling evaluators to gain insights into children's emotions, thoughts, life situations, and inner worlds (La Grutta et al., 2023).

In Adlerian play therapy, the second phase involves gathering information about the child and integrating it to understand the child's private logic, core beliefs, interpersonal patterns, and

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lifestyle. This process helps form a conceptualization of the child's lifestyle, which becomes a foundation for subsequent play therapy work. The Kinetic School Drawing (KSD) is one of the assessment tools used in this phase (Kottman & Meany-Walen, 2016).

KSD is a projective drawing task in which children are instructed: "I would like you to draw a picture of your school. Be sure to include yourself, your teacher, and one or two friends. Show everyone doing something..." (Kottman & Meany-Walen, 2016). Ahmed (2019) emphasized that KSD allows us to understand children's internal perceptions of their teachers, peers, and school environment, as well as their adjustment. By analyzing features in the drawings—such as distances between figures, figure size, missing facial features, types of interactions, and behaviors—it is possible to evaluate interpersonal relationships and emotional states. Andrews and Janzen (1988) further developed a systematic scoring and interpretation system (SRS) for KSD, which laid the methodological foundation for its clinical application. However, KSD was originally developed in Western societies and normed on children raised in those cultural contexts. Since drawings not only reflect children's inner representations but also the cultural milieu in which they grow up (Cherney et al., 2006), Ahmed (2019) suggested examining KSD's cultural adaptability when applied across diverse cultural contexts.

Research Purpose

Based on the above, this study aims to explore the feasibility of applying KSD in Taiwanese school counseling as a means to assess children's school adjustment and lifestyle.

Specifically, it seeks to answer:

- What are the experiences of using KSD to assess children's lifestyles in Adlerian play therapy?
- What are the benefits, challenges, and strategies for addressing these challenges?

Research Method

Participants and Research Process

Participants were four graduate students (3 females, 1 male; mean age = 31.2) who had received training in KSD and had experience using it.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using content analysis (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). Transcripts were first prepared verbatim, read repeatedly for contextual understanding, and segmented into meaning units. These were then condensed and summarized, coded into categories, and synthesized into overarching themes to capture the core meanings.

Interview Question Examples

1. When did you first begin using the Kinetic School Drawing (KSD) tool?
2. Can you describe the student's situation?
3. How is the child adapting to school? How are their peer relationships?

4. What was the child's reaction during the drawing process?
5. Did you notice anything special about the content of the child's drawing?
6. What difficulties or challenges did you encounter when implementing KSD?
7. Did this drawing provide you with any new insights about the child?
8. Do you feel this tool was helpful for understanding the case?
9. What limitations do you think this tool has?
10. How might this tool be improved?
11. Would using cards or other supplementary tools make it easier for children to express themselves?
12. Do you have any additional observations or suggestions to share?
13. Would you consider continuing to use this tool in the future?

Findings

- **KSD enhanced understanding of students' school experiences and lifestyles.**

This theme included six categories: (a) behavioral expression, (b) emotional expression, (c) cognitive representation, (d) strengths identification, (e) interpersonal relationships, and (f) self-concept. Collectively, these categories indicate that KSD provides educators and mental health professionals with a more holistic understanding of children's internal and external school experiences.

- **Challenges in the implementation process.**

This theme included: (a) children resisting drawing, (b) limitations in verbal expression, (c) children's anxiety about making mistakes, (d) difficulties in data collection without prior rapport, and (e) the need for follow-up interviews to obtain more complete information. Although KSD encourages free expression, some children may resist drawing or worry about drawing "incorrectly," and limited verbal ability can hinder post-drawing discussions. Participants also noted that a single-session assessment may not build sufficient trust, suggesting that follow-up interviews would enhance reliability.

- **Recommendations for developing culturally appropriate guidelines and lifestyle interview questions.**

Two categories were identified: (a) developing standardized procedures and manuals, and (b) contextualizing assessments for local culture. Findings indicated that KSD has the potential to evolve into a standardized tool. Participants recommended designing clear administration protocols, interview prompts, and scoring criteria to enhance consistency and minimize subjective bias. Moreover, in Taiwan, the concept of "school" may extend to include cram schools or after-school programs; thus, cultural clarification is necessary to ensure that drawings accurately reflect children's school-related experiences.

Conclusion

Overall, this study suggests that KSD provides a tangible medium for children to express their perspectives on school life, teacher-student interactions, peer relationships, and personal experiences. It supports the use of KSD as a potential tool for exploring children's lifestyles in school settings and recommends the development of standardized guidelines and culturally adapted manuals for future practice.

POSTER



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