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## **Conducting a Successful Concert for Young Children: A Case Study of Live Concert Performances in Preschools in Taiwan**

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**Abstract**

This paper reports on a case study of a series of live concerts held at a Taiwanese preschool, the main purpose being to examine the requirements for conducting a successful event for preschool-age children. The concerts were organized based on the needs and interests of the young children with the aim of engaging their attention and expanding the boundaries of their musical worlds; as such, they involved a variety of performers, including the children's family, and amateurs and professional musicians. The study was based on the conducting of ten concerts, whose programs included solos, ensemble performances, and musical activities. To sustain children's learning enthusiasm after the concerts, preschool teachers extended some activities in the class. Data was gathered through interviews of the children, their teachers and the performers, and supplemented through concert observations, group meetings, and children's works. Results showed that conducting a successful and meaningful concert for young children invariably depended on concert preparation, concert performance, and extension (post-concert) activities. Success also depended on the organizer, the host, and the classroom teachers. Overall, the concert project fostered children's creative thinking and aesthetics abilities.

**Key words**

Concert, music education, performance

## **Introduction**

### **Background**

In recent years STEAM education has become very popular, as it encourages the exploratory behavior of children and contributes towards their overall learning needs (Coleman, 2016; Moomaw & Davis, 2010). Robelen (2011) stated that: 'STEAM integration cultivates the intersection of the arts with other STEAM fields which not only enhances student engagement and learning, but also unlocks creative thinking and innovation.' It fosters exploration, creative thinking and problem-solving abilities for children (Coleman, 2016). Furthermore, it also offers meaningful collaboration between the STEAM fields, Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math, and provides children with hands-on experiences. Therefore, the incorporation of STEAM has resulted in a revival of the importance of the arts in early childhood education.

The ECEC curriculum framework (Taiwan, R.O.C.) includes Aesthetics, defined as an area of philosophy dealing with beauty and the arts (Ministry of Education, 2017). Taiwan's early education has attached increased importance to aesthetic education. The strategy of aesthetic education is to allow children to engage and experience beauty from daily life, and to build an aesthetic environment. Music is included within the media cluster (visual arts, aural arts and role-play) and plays an important part in the development of children's abilities in awareness / exploration, creating / performing, and response / appreciation. There is a philosophical basis behind this move. Plato and Aristotle recognized the power of music to arouse and purify human emotions, as well as its ability to cultivate human character and virtue (Lippman, 1964). Furthermore, Schiller (1794 / 1977) believed that aesthetic education could promote the harmonious development of human rationality and sensitivity, and possibly also to define a child's personality.

The ECEC curriculum framework (Taiwan, R.O.C.) includes six areas: physical

movement and health, language, cognition, social, emotional, and aesthetic. The current curriculum, which is in transition towards increased integration, has integrated music into the mainstream curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2017). Liao et al. (2014) found that thematic teaching with music as the main element expanded children's aesthetic experiences, as well as having the potential to integrate courses across various areas.

Lin (2021), a leader in the field of aesthetics in Taiwan, has emphasized that the activities of the whole preschool have a great impact on young children's learning in addition to the general curriculum or routine activities in preschool. Liao (2022) believed that providing young children with a variety of musical experiences, such as holding a concert for preschoolers, was one of the important ways to enhance children's aesthetic experiences. In particular, attending concerts can enhance young children's music response and appreciation abilities.

Live concerts can potentially expand the musical horizons of young children (Liao, 2022; Suthers, 2008). Concerts also profoundly stimulate the academic and musical interests of children as much as they enhance children's aesthetics experience (Liao, 2022; Liao & Wei, 2018; Liao, *et al.*, 2014; Suthers, 2008). Given their positive influence on young children (Kenney, 2009; Nyland, Ferris, & Deans, 2010; Suthers, 2008), proper planning and execution are necessary to successfully organize a meaningful concert. According to Suthers (2008), Meyers (2005), and Smith (2011), concerts for young children should be short, interactive, fast-paced, varied in their repertoires, and presented by a performer who can connect well with a young audience. Concerts should include a variety of musical styles, genres or extra-musical messages, and feature at least one or more pieces of music familiar to the children (Kenney, 2009; Meyers, 2005; Thompson, 1996; Smith, 2011).

Liao (2022) and Suthers (2008) indicated that the host plays a vital role in a concert. They are the bridge between the performers and the young children and are highly skilled in

delighting the children while also educating them. Hosts knowledgeable in music and education have a greater advantage, as they can lead children in musical learning during concerts. If the performers have had experience working with children, the host can effectively become an audience member in the company of the young participants.

Educators and performers have differing opinions about which kind of concert venue encourages the best interactions between children and performers (Liao, 2022; Suthers, 2008). Suthers and Larkin (1997) found that personal interaction with the performers at the end of the concert can provide additional modes of engagement. Follow-up materials – CDs, videos, DVDs and printed materials – are useful in terms of helping the children remember their concert experience and for the teachers to integrate the concert experience into the regular curriculum (Suthers, 2008). Liao (2022), Liao & Wei, (2018) and Suthers (2008) also stressed that integration of the concert experience into the preschool curriculum is important to make a deeper impression on young children's concert experience. Relating to other learning before and after the concert is also valuable. In addition to placing an emphasis on aesthetics, the ECEC curriculum framework (Taiwan, R.O.C.) stresses the importance of using family and community resources towards the education of children. The support of parents and the community not only enhances children's interest in learning, but also increases their identification with the community (Hall, Wall, Higgins, Stephens, Pooley & Welham, 2005; Kenney, 2014; Liao, 2022; Ministry of Education, 2017). Teachers can organize interactive sessions with the community so that children appreciate and identify with the existing culture in formal or informal settings. For example, the children know what colleges and musical clubs are in the community. Whether it is a parent or a performer in the community, it is a very good example for young children and can influence their future views of music. In addition, Liao et al. (2014) pointed out that inviting performers from amongst the community for the preschool concert can also reduce the financial pressure, because most of the

performers can participate as volunteers. A preschool therefore plays an important role in creating interactions between young children, families and communities and creates an enabling environment to expand the experience of children's close-range art appreciation (Lin, 2021; Ministry of Education, 2017).

The ECEC curriculum framework (Taiwan, R.O.C.) is particularly related to the teaching methods discussed seriously during the past few years in Taiwan. Although performances are one of the important preschool activities, the focus of the quality of performances is seldom discussed. Therefore, the main purpose of this study was to use family and community resources to organize concerts, and examine the elements of conducting a successful concert.

## **Methodology**

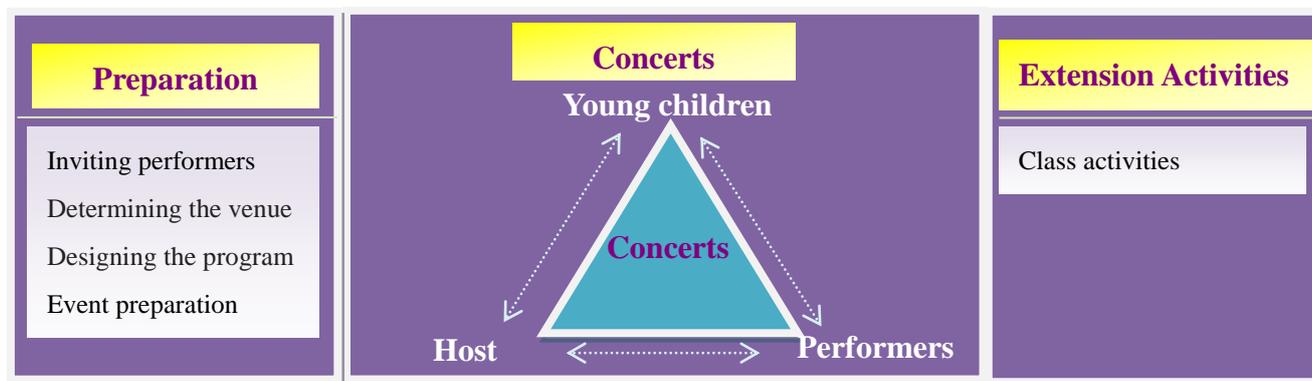
### **Research method and framework**

To gain some insight into the effects of live concerts in a preschool, and better explain the realities of the concerts, it was decided that this should be a qualitative oriented case study. It focused on ten concerts performed for children in a preschool in Taiwan and examined the attributes of conducting a successful concert based on children's needs. The research framework consisted of three distinct stages: preparation, concerts, and extension activities (Figure 1). The details will be presented in the following sections.

The preparation stage included activities such as inviting performers, determining the venue, designing the program and preparing for the event, and was carried out mainly by preschool administrators, teachers and the concert organizer. During the concert stage, the interaction between the young children, host and performers was the main focus. In addition, the participation of children at concerts was also a focus of observation.

Two cameras were set up to capture the scene from two perspectives so as to review the

recordings and make observations. The class teachers led extension activities after the concert, which included group discussions and activities that integrated the content of the concert into the curriculum. They formed the basis of analyzing the impact of the concert.



**Figure 1** *The research framework*

### **Background of the preschool**

Genies Preschool is located in Hsin-chu county of north Taiwan. The preschool has a total of four classes, including two classes for children aged 5-6, one class for children aged 4-5 and the other class for children aged 3-4. There are about 10-15 young children with a teacher in a class. A few children had attended a formal concert prior to the preschool live concerts taking place. Some of them learned piano and violin. They had experiences of listening and moving to music sometimes in the class. However, music was not incorporated much in this preschool before undertaking the concert project. The social status and educational background of parents were middle or upper middle class. The preschool's thematic teaching is "Music Magician" during the project taking place. Therefore, their entire curriculum integrated the various fields with the theme of music. Through industry-academia cooperation, the preschool invited a professional music teacher, and one of the researchers, to organize a series of concerts to support the music thematic curriculum.

## Concert arrangement

Ten concerts (Table 1) were organized for young children by inviting a music specialist who taught in the Early Childhood Education department of the local university and had also participated in the preschool curriculum discussion. The music specialist was, therefore, familiar with the curriculum, the people, and the culture of the preschool. The concerts took place once every two weeks in the morning and parents were invited to attend the concerts.

**Table 1** *Concert program arrangements*

Instrument	Performing style	Performers	Venue
Guitar		Parent (Dad)	
Electronic Guitar			
Recorder	Solo	Amateur	Preschool
Piano		Parent (Mom)	
Violin		Professional	
Percussion/Chorus	Ensemble/Chorus		University
Wind/Brass	Ensemble	University students' club	Park
Chinese Instruments			
Piano	Solo & duet	Professional	University
Soprano/Bass			

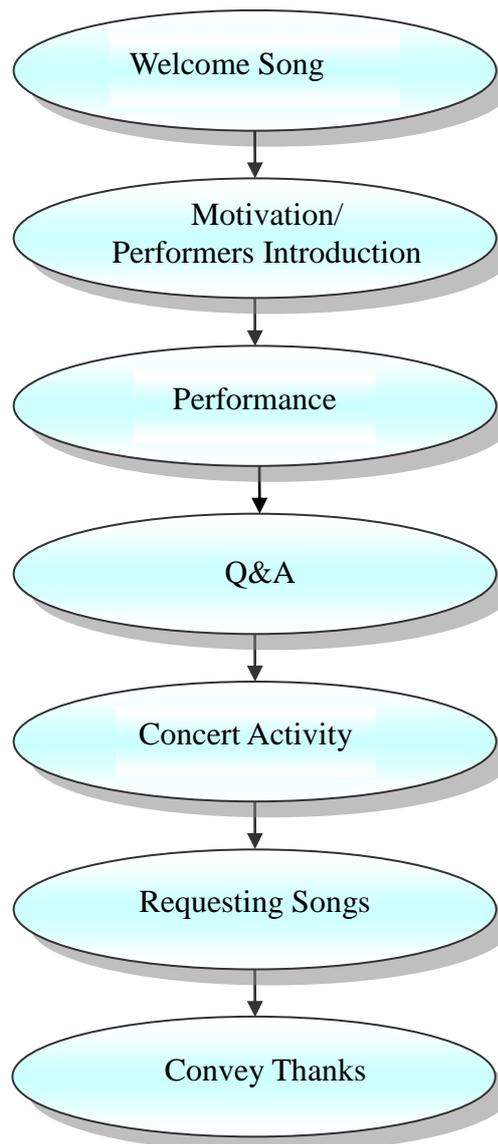
### 1. Pre-concert Preparation

Before the children attended the concert, they prepared a welcome poster and composed a welcome song with their teacher in class. Meanwhile, the class teachers provided some information about the instruments to raise the children's interest. Before the first concert, the class teachers organized group discussions with the children to learn about their experiences of attending concerts. After participating at the second concert, the children were asked to recap what they observed and felt about the previous concerts. They were also encouraged to ask questions during the concert.

## 2. The Concert

The structure of the concert is shown in Figure 2. The concert began with a welcome and introduction by the host. This was followed by the main performance and interactive activities (Q & A, games, song requests, and vote of thanks). When the performer entered the concert hall, the children sang the welcome song. The host introduced the performer, who took the stage for 10 minutes, during which several short pieces were performed. Musical activities or instrument exploration were sometimes provided. The Q & A session provided an opportunity for some interaction between the performers and the children. The performer also accepted children's song requests. The duration of the concert varied from 30 to 60 minutes.

The host played a vital role during the concert, engaging the children with the performers. Of the three hosts who got involved in the ten concerts, one was the preschool's curriculum tutor, while the other two hosts were university teachers of the early childhood education department. All of them possessed the knowledge of preschool curriculum, music and children's learning psychology.



**Figure 2** *Structure of the concert*

### 3. Extension activities

After the concert, the class teachers extended the activity into the curriculum. This involved the children going to the learning center to read music related books in order to get more information on the questions. Other activities such as instrument-making, paintings, discussions and field trips were also introduced for the purpose of further engaging the children.

### **Data collection and reliability / validity**

Data collection from the pre-concert orientation, concert and post-concert course extension elements included:

1. **Observations:** The behavior of 56 children was observed during and after the concert. During the concert, the most important thing was to observe the children's concentration levels, interaction with the performers, and participation in the concert activities. After the concert, the children's responses and performance in the concert-related curriculum extension classroom activities was another important observation.
2. **Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the children, classroom teachers, performers, and hosts after the concert in order to understand the impact of the concert. Children were particularly asked about the aspects of the concert that pleased them.
3. **Documentary analysis:** Documentary analysis included children's work and meeting records. The welcome posters and the concert-related works (such as pictures and three-dimensional artworks of music) in the class extension were the basis for analyzing the children's works. Up to 24 meetings were undertaken before and after each concert by the preschool director, classroom teachers, concert organizer and hosts to review the effects of the concert, extend the curriculum and plan new concerts.

The coding steps of Boeije (2010) were followed as a means of analyzing and organizing the data. The process included the following steps:

1. **Coding:** Coding was undertaken according to the three dimensions of the research framework, namely preparation, concert, and extension activities.
2. **Classification:** Data was classified according to the general categories, i.e. preparation, concert, and extension activities, and the sub-concepts, i.e. concert: children, host, performer, interaction. Any information that was not the focus of the research was deleted.

The relevant information was then summarized and organized according to the focus of the research.

3. Linking: The classified data were compiled into the integration, analysis and induction of the concert content, so as to achieve a complete interpretation of the concert.

A triangular validation method was applied so as to improve the reliability and validity of the research findings. Cross-comparison and synthesis of the data at different times from different sources (observations, interviews, and documentary analysis) were done in order to enhance the reliability and validity of the data.

## **Results**

### **1. Pre-concert preparation**

During the semester, the preschool director regularly convened meetings for the class teachers and hosts. These were necessary to organize the concerts and created an opportunity to share concert experiences and generate ideas for continuous improvements while also helping to develop educational goals for the children. The meetings usually involved the preschool director, who had the power to support and sponsor the concerts and children's learning. The class teachers prepared the children for the concert and extended activities and communicated with each concert organizer about the children's interests and progress. However, the hosts who were familiar with the children's former and current experiences at school were also able to play a meaningful role in the concert, thereby helping the classroom teachers to incorporate the concerts into their curriculum.

### *Inviting performers*

The concerts were designed to meet the diverse musical experiences of young children. Performances varied from solos and duets to ensembles and larger groups. Performers included parents, amateurs and professionals. Children's informal interviews (reproduced

below) revealed that they loved all the performing styles and performers. Some of them even wished their parents were performers.

I liked Professor Mai. I wish I could be a violinist in the future. (Child 09)

It's really cool that Chia-yi's dad played the guitar. I wish my dad could come to perform, too. (Child 14)

I liked all of them. (Children 01, 08, 16, 33, 40)

From the observations during the concerts and follow-up discussions with the children, it is fair to say that most of them appreciated the performers and liked their performance styles. The involvement of their parents as performers further enhanced the children's interest. Parents proved to be good performers, as well as fitting role models for the children.

#### *Determining the venue*

Five concerts were held in the preschool, one in a community park, and four on the university campus. The original plan was to arrange the indoor concert first to increase the children's levels of concentration. It was observed that children had higher concentration levels indoors than outdoors. The venue in the park had a positive effect because the children felt it was unique. Although it took time to clean the venue, children had an enhanced valuable experience at the outdoor venue. Children who traveled to a venue outside their preschool were also excited by the trip and a new location, as well as stimulated by the concert performance. The children reported that they loved all the venues at the preschools because of the excitement of the trip to a new place.

I like to go outside. (Child 07)

I like the park. After the concert, we can play instrument games here. (Child 21)

The children sat on moveable chairs, on floors or on fixed seating (the university concert room), or chairs (at the university venues). Depending on the performance style or venue,

arrangements were generally good. However, the children tended to fall asleep at the concert on the university campus. It might have been because the big space, the air conditioner and the distance from the audience to the performers increased their tendency to relax and decreased their concentration. Based on this observation, concert venues are likely to determine the level of children's concentration.

The raised stage at the university venue also created a perception of distance between the audience and the performers, even though the children enjoyed the formal concert atmosphere. All the performers enjoyed performing without a raised stage. The professional violinist said, 'I have never performed except on a raised stage. However, there was only a short distance to the young audience so that the children could see the instruments clearly, which made for good interaction'. The park ensemble members expressed the same opinion. The leader of the ensemble group said, 'We wanted to excite a response from our audience, not just have children sit and be passive. Without a stage, we could stand closer to the young audience and sometimes walk over to them. They felt excited.'

Choice of concert venues depended on the availability of funds. Fortunately, venues at the park and university were open free of charge for young children. The project members believed that it was important to build good connections with the community or cooperate with the university.

## **Designing the program**

### *(1) Duration of the concert*

The duration of the concert was considered crucial to this project. It varied from 30 to 60 minutes in length depending on performance styles and concert schedules. The first three concerts, conducted in a preschool room, lasted 25-30 minutes. The duration was kept short because the children were not familiar with attending a concert. Once the children had the

experience, they could concentrate longer. The duration of the concert at the outdoor venues was about an hour because there was more space to move and conduct activities. Through concert observations, children (3 to 4 years old) improved their concentration levels by attending more concerts. At the beginning of the concert, some children talked and looked around. However, they were quiet and attentive in the subsequent concerts. In general, 30 to 45 minutes was the ideal concert duration, as observed by Suthers (2008).

### *(2) Repertoire*

The concert organizer and performers were both keen to expand the children's musical worlds through live performance. They all agreed that the concert program needed to be engaging and varied in order to capture and maintain the attention of the children. A well-known song (i.e. movie music in this project), rhyme, cartoon songs, folk songs and classical music were all used effectively by the performers in this project. The songs or pieces were between one to three minutes in length. The children liked the familiar songs, such as cartoon songs or movie music.

We used some familiar children's songs because we wanted the children to sing along with us. (Concert 10, female singer)

From the observations, it was noted that the children could concentrate well with classical music, too. Some of the children could name the musical instruments and the pieces of classical music, and express their feelings about the music.

I liked the violin songs, which made me feel as if I was dreaming. (Child 07)

The optimal concert repertoires possibly enriched the children's musical experiences, but the children preferred short pieces.

### *(3) Design of the program*

Another key point for a successful concert was the design of the program. The program organizer not only had to possess musical knowledge and early childhood education, but also know the children's needs and be aware of their former experiences. As the concerts were designed to integrate with the preschool curriculum, the organizer had to also be familiar with the class schedule.

Generally, most of the formal concerts did not have provisions for interaction between the performers and the audience because of the stage or limited space. Therefore, traditional concerts were less interactive and unable to attract young children. Because most of the preschool children had not had any previous experience with musical instruments, an introduction and exploration of these was one of the most important activities within the program. Young audiences were active and forthcoming when it came to participating in the concert and interacting with the performers. The concerts also provided opportunities for the children to participate in a variety of ways, such as through talking with the performers, and active involvement during the performance by way of clapping, singing or moving appropriately.

### **Children's preparations**

The project members met before the concert to brief the teachers on how to prepare the children for the concert. The children took turns to make welcome posters, which raised their expectation and excitement. In addition, they found out about the instruments ahead of time.

In addition to a welcome poster, the teachers helped the children to frame questions that they wanted to ask the performers. Therefore, the children could practice how to ask a good question. One of the teachers said, 'In the beginning, they had very few ideas what to ask. Step by step, they could raise very good questions such as, "Why did you decide to learn this

instrument?’”

## **2. The concerts**

At the beginning, the model for each concert was based on a structured sequence beginning with an introduction of the performer, followed by the performance and ending with song requests. The structure of the concert during the later stages became more flexible. The first three concerts at the beginning were more like a static process due to the children’s lack of concert experience. The main concern was that if dynamic activities made the children overly excited, it would be difficult to manage them. After the children had had enough experience, some interactive or extended activities were added to the subsequent process, which led to good results. The welcome and introduction sections were combined, with the performance and activities (interactive questions and answers, games, song requests and thank yous) all being included during the last concert. The procedural order could also be changed, depending on the performers’ needs.

### **Part I: Welcome and introduction**

At the first two concerts, the children only clapped for the performers. Subsequently, the teachers guided them to create their own style of welcome song. This was much appreciated by the performers. One of the percussion group members said, ‘The children sang in a very creative way, which reduced my anxiety.’ One of the professional pianists said, ‘It was my first time to hear a lovely welcome song from a young audience at the beginning of a concert. I felt that I had to show them something creative.’ With some encouraging remarks, the host briefly introduced the performers and provided some information on the performance. This also raised the children’s interest.

Professor Mai was really great. He has won so many prizes. I wish I could be a violinist like him. (Child 02)

Teacher Kai is from Vienna. I know Vienna. Mozart was born there. (Child 14)

## **Part II: Performance**

Normally, the performers played several short pieces for about 10 minutes. Sometimes the host or performer would introduce the song, which was important to give the children the background of the song. The children concentrated well, regardless of whether they were vocal or instrumental performances. Likewise, they enjoyed the professional singing and knew what the opera singers sang.

He (professional singer – bass) sang very low like a French horn. It was really interesting. (Child 11)

Teacher Melody (professional singer – soprano) sang very high. I liked it. (Child 22)

The different instruments also interested the children. When the performer introduced the instruments and imitated an animal's voice or a familiar sound, they laughed at once. In the brass ensemble concert, children showed enthusiasm for instrument introduction.

I liked the French horn. It sounded like someone breaking wind. (Child 02)

## **Part III: Activities**

The children enjoyed their interactions with the performers, whether they provided opportunities for games, talking or explorations of the instruments. The children showed more excitement when they could touch the instruments. They also enjoyed playing the instruments with the performers.

I liked the big drum (Chinese drum). It was very loud. (Child 05)

I liked the French horn. I could put my hand in. (Child 08)

The children were willing to ask questions. In the violin concert, this led to some interesting conversations.

*Child:* Why do you sweat so much, Professor Mai?

*Violinist:* Because I play seriously.

*Child:* Because you are a professor.

After the professor introduced himself and said that he had been to many countries, the children responded, ‘Cool! I wish I were you. I will be like you when I grow up’. During the concert, the children learned how to be a good performer.

I must practice more. I have to involve my feelings in the song, then I can perform better. (Child 06)

The role of the host was very important in each concert. Even though most of them had little experience performing for young children, the hosts tried to make the concert lively. From our observations, the host played an important role in making the activity interesting for the children. Because the performer did not know the “kid” vernacular, a good host could explain and interpret the answers for the children.

I didn’t know how to introduce my instrument, due to stage anxiety. The host used very simple language to explain for me. I felt safe. (Flute player)

I don’t know how to talk to children very well. I thanked the host for helping me to explain something, which enabled the children to understand what I meant. (Recorder player)

### **3. Extension of activities**

The concerts were designed to enhance the music curriculum, so the extension activities after each concert were an important element. The class teachers completed the extension activities

after the concerts in order to promote the children's active participation and demonstrate their enthusiasm for future concerts. In the meeting, classroom teachers expressed the meaningfulness of the concerts in raising the children's musical interests, which helped to bring them into the class. The teachers highlighted the importance of forging links between the concert experiences and their learning program in order to enable the children to make connections between the curriculum, playroom experiences and the performances.

The children always looked forward to the concerts and knew the number of concerts remaining in the program. Through observations, the children came to preschool earlier than usual, even on Mondays. They always incorporated pictures of concerts in their free plays and works. For example, after the first event one of the children, aged three, was playing the piano. The other students were the audience. When she stopped playing, the audience clapped for her.

In addition, the children were enthusiastic about using their different styles to create their learning environment. Their thoughts influenced the image of the concerts. They expressed that they always thought of the concerts when they were painting or making instruments. The children seemed to include the clapping and bowing aspects of the performances in their own play. After the concerts, they always spontaneously discussed the details with teachers, peers, and parents, and imitated concert scenes in role-plays, which increased their learning motivation and improved their interpersonal communication and social development.

I like attending class because we have lots of fun. We can make instruments, draw, and listen to concerts. (Child 02)

The concerts provided opportunities for them to interact and learn more about the various instruments. The live performances helped the class teacher to do extension activities through their thematic teaching. For example, one child (Child 04) made a welcome poster

(Figure 3) for Professor Mai (violinist). She made the poster by using her imagination. After attending the concert, she was asked to draw the poster again (Figure 4). Figures 3 and 4 highlight the fluency and refinement of this child's image depiction, especially the differences in concert perception before and after participating in the concert; the stage scenes, Professor Mai's playing style and stage movement position, the expressions of the characters and the behavior of the other audience members all showed the child's ability to observe concert sensitivity.



**Figure 3** *Welcome poster*



**Figure 4** *Violin concert*

The child who made these pictures said:

(Pointing at Figure 3) I thought Professor Mai would sit on the sofa and play the violin for us. Everybody was watching the show quietly ... After attending the concert, I found that Professor Mai did not stand on the stage. He walked over to us sometimes. Sometimes, he needed a microphone. The professor played very well

(pointing to the four black lines above the violin). The younger children sometimes talked to each other. My friends felt that they should not talk in the concert.

The children loved sharing their opinions and asked music-related questions of the teachers. For instance, in one vocal music concert, when a young child saw the grand piano being played he asked the teacher, ‘Why is this piano triangular?’ Their interest in the topic of music increased. They demonstrated better insights and understanding of concepts while doing teamwork. They talked about the differences between acoustic guitars and electronic guitars when they were making guitars. The concerts provided clear pictures for the children, which made extra activities easier for the teachers. The teachers thought that the young children experienced the same concerts and had similar experiences. Therefore, it was easy to use the experience of the concerts to extend learning while thematic teaching was in progress. For example, everyone had seen the piano and knew that there were black and white keys on it. The teacher could easily lead them to make a piano by hand without the need to explain.

Because they all had the same experiences, they tended to automatically discuss and share their musical opinions. (Teacher A)

Because they all had the same experiences, they followed the order and rules when they were doing group work. (Teacher C)

## **Discussions and Implications**

### **Pre-concert preparation**

A concert designed for young children with education objectives is organized in a different manner compared to a traditional concert for adult audiences. For a successful preschool concert, the role of the program organizer and the involvement of a support team comprising the preschool director and class teachers is extremely important. The organizer’s role is to prepare for the concert based on the needs and interests of the young audience with a focus on engaging their attention and enhancing their interest in music. In order to achieve this

objective, the organizer must consider the school culture, the curriculum, and the children's learning abilities. Above all, the organizer must have a good working relationship with the director.

This study showed that involvement of a guest music professor in the organization of the concert programs had great experiential value for the preschool director and teachers. The group meetings helped to develop a better understanding of the relevance of the concerts and how they met the requirements of the prescribed curriculum. In addition, the preschool director and the teachers gained the experience of how to organize a concert and integrate it into the curriculum. Gruenhagen (2007) and Liao (2022) reported similar positive impacts on professional development through such collaborative activities. However, a strong teaching network is the key to conducting a successful concert. This also implies the importance of preschool-university cooperation. If the preschool teaching teams do not have a strong background in music, it is a good idea to invite a music expert from a university to participate in the project. In recent years, the Taiwanese government has provided human resources and encouraged collaborations between preschools and university teachers. This working relationship can lead to high-quality concerts to enhance children's aesthetics experience. To minimize pressure on the school budget, community resources can be used and parents or friends involved on a voluntary basis.

Although most of the children enjoyed all the concert performances, they expressed that they preferred ensemble groups over solo performances. Therefore, it is extremely important to connect with high school or university bands. Regardless, professional or amateur performers are good models for children's musical learning. The children also expected their parents or familiar people to perform. Involving family members in the preschool program as a way to connect with family and preschools is supported by Kenney (2014) and Yamamoto (2006). They believed that the parents' participation and companionship were essential for

children's aesthetic education. This idea is also supported by Taiwan's Education Ministry (2017), which believes that providing the best resources for families and communities will enhance children's interest and increase teaching efficiency. Once the relevant connections have been built, these can help the preschool teachers to develop a more interesting curriculum.

### **The concerts**

The results showed that children were enthusiastic and actively participated in the concerts. It appears that children accepted any kind of performance styles or instruments. This behavior is reflected in Gordon's music learning theory (1997), which states that if young children are exposed to music in their early years, they are more receptive to a variety of music. The rich environment plays a vital role in early childhood in terms of developing children's musical potential and creativity (Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 2009; Kenney, 1997; Wesseldijk, Mosing, & Ullén, 2019). The earlier and more varied a child's music experiences, the greater the children's musical development (Gordon, 1997, Thomas, 2009). As almost all children are musical, it is very important that preschools provide different music styles, songs, and instruments for children.

The optimal concert venues offered enough space for movement or activities. The raised stage reduced the levels of interaction between the performers and the children. Although the children concentrated better inside the room than outdoors, they enjoyed all the concert venues. It might be important to offer different experiences in different venues. Changing concert venues may increase their concentration.

The results also showed that a good host established a good concert atmosphere, a role considered essential and acknowledged by Liao (2022), Kenney (2014) and Smith (2011). According to Liao (2022) and Liao & Campbell (2016), preschool teachers are less confident

in leading musical activities. In this study, it was possible to invite experts to conduct demonstrations within the framework of industry-university cooperation. Teachers could learn from it, and through imitation they could also become good concert hosts. During the concerts, the hosts built a bridge between the performers and the young children because the hosts knew what the children needed for optimal interaction. Therefore, with practice, a preschool teacher can become a better host than inviting an off-campus expert.

Finally, the program design was an important consideration for a successful concert. Observations of the ten children's concerts clearly showed the importance of interactive performances. Concerts combined games, storytelling, and instrumental exploration using great music with demonstrably positive effects, a finding also reported by Suthers and Larkin (1997).

In terms of program arrangement, resources determined the success of a concert. When the organizer has access to human and environmental resources from preschool parents and community, there are more opportunities to create diverse programs. Once there is access to resources, young children's needs can be matched to performance forms and activities. This is in agreement with the observations of Liao (2022) and the Ministry of Education (2017), both of which indicated that community resources can bring greater benefits to young children's learning.

Similarly, the children showed that they loved exploring the instruments. This, in turn, led to a greater desire to learn an instrument. From this point of view, providing an instrument exploration session played a vital role within the concert procedure. In this project, compared to percussion instruments, children looked more active in communicating with performers when they were allowed to touch the brass or Chinese instruments. Children love to encounter new things, so providing multiple opportunities can enhance their motivation for learning. Kenny (2014) and Smith (2011) both agree that activities are necessary for young

children in concerts to keep them fresh and interested.

Music arrangements were also important. The piece should not be too long, but limited to 2-4 minutes. Songs familiar to children motivate their interest. The length of the concert should be from 45 minutes to one hour, depending on the performance style and activities. These details were also confirmed by Suthers (2008), Meyers (2005), Russell (2006) and Smith (2011). Similarly, Liao (2022) and Suthers (2008) also found that children as young as four can attend if the programme is not too long and provides a variety of experiences. In this study, after attending a number of concerts the concentration span of even very young children (3-4 years old) increased to the point that they could easily participate in a 45-minute concert. Again, providing varied musical experiences benefits children's multiple developments.

### **Extension activities**

The findings showed that extension activities after the concert and integration within the curriculum were important. Although music is an aesthetic field, it is part of the curriculum. However, it can be combined with linguistic, cognitive, emotional and social domains. For example, after watching a piano concert, the children combined visual arts with mathematics, using cardboard to make the piano and measuring the length keyboard. In addition, when they had finished, they simulated playing a piano concerto, which integrated the cognitive with the emotional and social domains. The class teachers, through their participation in meetings and concerts, knew how to extend the activities after the concerts. They reviewed concert content in the class for the benefit of the children and hoped they would show interest in future concerts. Live concerts helped children to develop their comprehensive aesthetic and general abilities through curriculum integration. According to Liao (2022) and Suthers (2008), supporting materials can assist practitioners to help children recall the concert experience and

incorporate elements of the concert into their own performances. These concerts had a number of important benefits and positively influenced children's growth and musical development.

The findings indicated that the children loved the concerts and were willing to share their experiences and opinions to others in the class. What they had learned from the concerts could be observed in the class or in their work, supporting Piaget's and Bruner's developmental theories that children need concrete objects in early childhood to manipulate the world. Therefore, children learn better from reality than from books or their imaginations.

The results also revealed the insights the children were able bring to their work after attending the live concerts, helped them to study their own perceptions. Subsequently, they were able to transform the experience of what they saw and heard into visual images in the form of paintings. This supports the theory of metacognition (Flavell, 1976), implying that providing a live show is important to children. If the concert can be connected to the curriculum, children will participate more fully in class (Liao, 2002; Liao & Wei, 2018). As a result, their leaning becomes meaningful.

### **Conclusions**

Most of the research on early childhood music education focuses on musical learning in a formal setting, but informal musical activities such as concert performances are seldom discussed. This study examined the requirements of conducting a successful concert for preschool children with the objective of fostering their musical interests, musical growth, and an interest in aesthetics. The results indicated that a well-designed concert that was properly conducted, and followed up with extended activities, enhanced the value of the children's concert experiences.

During the preparatory phase, the concert organizer played a vital role in influencing the

outcome of the concert because the preparation required the mobilization of the right set of critical resources. At the same time, the task called for a thorough understanding of the needs of preschool children; organizers who possessed such skill sets were particularly effective. When the concert began, its success in terms of achieving the learning objectives very much depended on the host and the performers, both of whom, through their mutual understanding and collaboration, were able to conduct the event successfully and provide the children with a variety of educational and musical benefits. The role of the class teacher, which began after the concert, was to integrate the children's concert experiences into their curriculum. A successful concert, therefore, calls for good preparation, execution, and follow-up. If these three components are properly addressed, a successful concert can influence children's enthusiasm for learning and expand their musical horizons. Additionally, the role of children's families, and the community, are just as important in stimulating the learning interest of children and enriching the teaching-learning process. In the long run, the accumulated effects of a concert experience can bring about a positive impact on the musical growth of children.

Although more time is needed to research the lasting impact of the educational value of preschool concerts, this study has highlighted some key issues associated with concert performances for young children and serves as a useful baseline for planning successful events of this kind. Further studies are needed to examine the effects of different activities in connecting the school and the family, e.g., through the use of storytelling, drama, dance, and visual arts. At the same time, preschools can invite family members to perform. As the parents who take part may not be professionals, there are, naturally, limitations associated with this. In addition to the above, further studies can examine how best to involve family members as performers so that preschools are given the confidence to conduct more concerts for young children.

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