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## **Discovering Children's Understanding of, and Engagement with, Music through Drawing**

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### **Abstract**

Much research has been conducted on children's perspectives of music as expressed through visual art (Whiteman & Campbell, 2009; Creech & Hallam, 2006; Burnard, 2000; Hair,

1994). It is argued that all of the senses are engaged through listening to music, participating in musical performances, watching live performances, and various other musical activities. Combined art and music education can be a valuable approach to teaching and learning. The main focus of this study is the question of what do children's drawings tell us about their understanding of, and engagement with, music? The data consisted of a collection of children's drawings. The results indicate that for the children, 'music' means making or actively taking part in the music. The children are not passive recipients but music-makers. For school music educators this suggests that class music should be a time of active engagement with music, as this is what the children value and what they will remember as significant in their schooling.

**Keywords:** children's drawings; active music making; primary school music; drawing

## **Introduction**

Before 1998 in Taiwan, music, physical education and art education in the curriculum in primary school were taught separately. After 1998, the Curriculum for Grades 1-9 Guidelines were issued by the Ministry of Education. The core competencies for the “Arts and Humanities Learning Area” emphasize three areas: visual performance, learning of aesthetics concepts, and application of knowledge through learning (K-12 Education Administration, Ministry of Education, 2014). These areas are to be taught together in an integrated manner. Likewise, the framework for learning stresses life experiences, life-long learning for arts-based abilities, and encourages participation in arts activities. An appreciation of the arts is promoted to cultivate artistic potential and for the benefits of personal cognitive and emotional development. Much research has been conducted on children’s perspectives of music associated with art (Burnard, 2009; Whiteman & Campbell, 2009; Creech & Hallam, 2006; Hair, 1994). It is argued that all the senses are engaged through listening to music, participating in musical performances, and watching live performances in music drama and various other events. Combined art and music education can be a rich approach to teaching and learning (Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 2014).

The particulars of the guidelines contained several features including the policy of integrating music with both visual art and performing art. The emphasis is on children’s creative performance of art and the cultivation of their initiative, independence, motivation

and positive attitudes towards music. The suite of arts and humanities learning curriculum is expected to reflect the school's character, local community, teacher professional experience and students' need. This foundation implies that children could demonstrate a variety of arts-based abilities and have used pictorial representations of what they have seen and what they know from the world around them. It should be noted that primary schooling in Taiwan is based on the western educational practices introduced a century ago by the Japanese during the Protectorate from 1895-1945 (Lee, 2002). Many of the present practice of schools in Taiwan are very similar to those found in schools across the globe. A common and long established practice in schools has been to ask children to draw images to accompany other work. It is common in Taiwan for school visitors to find examples of children's art on many walls. These drawings can be merely decorative but they can also offer insight into how children think about different issues and topics and their perception of art.

Recent research has explored children's drawings on various topics and broad concepts encompassing emotional development and social relationships. For example, the psychological development of children has been evaluated by their drawings (Holliday, Harrison & McLeod, 2009). Drawing pictures which convey ideas can reveal multiple interwoven levels of meaning (Winters, 2014). Such images have "pictorial and conceptual qualities" (Elkins, 1999) and reflect deeply held cultural meanings through depictions of social representations (de Ross, 1987). For example, understanding of gender and culture can

be reflected in children's drawings (Tay-Lim & Lim, 2013). Images convey ideas and experiential understanding "in ways verbal language cannot" (Winters, 2014, p. 2). It is this characteristic that makes drawn visual images unique. As Thomas and Silk (1990) wrote, children's drawings provide a 'window' into their thoughts and feelings, mainly because they reflect an image of his/her own mind. Furthermore, Brand and Dolloff (2002) stated, drawings were containers for our thoughts and reflect our personal stories. Bruner (1964, p. 18) maintained that drawing was a form of communication that reflects the distinctive features of the represented experience. For violin learning experience, Creech and Hallam (2006) concluded that students' drawings did convey credible accounts of the outcomes experienced by pupils, including enjoyment of music, personal satisfaction, motivation, self-efficacy, self esteem and friendship.

With respect to drawing as a useful research tool, King (1995) maintained that drawing techniques provide a relatively easy way to gather social information from and about children. Other researchers including Barraza (1999), Kendrick, McKay, and Moffatt (2005), Maxwell (2006) and Pezzica et al., (2015) also support the use of drawings to assess children's perceptions of their environment and school relationships.

Despite all the advantages of drawing in assessing children's diverse learning, especially in music activity, there were some limitations. Firstly, the researcher did not administer a musical activity. Rather the children were asked to depict learning an instrument,

participating in a music class, music classroom or an outside school experience. However, the children's responses were subjective and idiosyncratic which allowed insight into their thinking about musical engagement. A second caveat of this method was that the researcher showed a PowerPoint presentation that included images of school based music learning. This may have directly influenced what the children drew. A third limitation was that the children were not given any advice by the researcher or classroom teachers while they drew and wrote a short statement. Children were free to draw and express their ideas. A fourth limitation could be the localized research findings, given that participants in the present study came from a specific county in Taiwan. The findings in no way represent a comprehensive analysis of Taiwan and cannot be used as recommendations for the nation. However, they do offer indicative information about how children understand music making.

### **Method**

This study employed the qualitative method in a case study design. The case study included 9-10 year old students from two primary schools from Yunlin county in Taiwan. Qualitative research is based upon an inductive strategy whereby ideas, concepts, and themes emerge from the data (Duay & Bryan, 2007; Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Merriam, 1998). This study examined children's drawings to understand their perceptions of and engagement with music. Data comprised of children's visual images. The data was collected in two ways: (1) Children

were asked to draw a picture and write a short statement, and (2) Teachers were interviewed.

Consent was obtained from the primary teachers before the beginning of the experiment.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study were teachers and children from two primary schools in Taiwan.

A limited sample of six qualified primary teachers teaching children ranging from nine to ten

years of age agreed to participate. These teachers were not music specialists. Only School A

employed a specialist music teacher, who taught grade three for forty minutes once per week.

School A had about 750 students and School B had approximately 720 students. School A

consented to five classes of student participants and School B consented to one class.

Together, there was a total of  $n=136$  children participants. All students were currently

learning the musical instrument the soprano recorder. At School A the soprano recorder was

taught by the music specialist and at School B it was taught by the classroom teacher. School

A additionally held weekly music programs such as soprano recorder group, choir, and brass

ensemble. These music programs were offered as electives and entrance was based on

audition. Some of the participants in this study were concurrently undertaking these electives

activities. Both schools held many public concerts and as such, students had many chances to

watch and listen to other performances.

### **Collection of data**

Children participants were given paper and art supplies to create art, which were collected after the experiment. Teacher interviews from class A, B, C, D, E and F (pseudonyms) were performed in person at the primary school. Questions were asked verbally and responses were recorded by a tape recorder and transcribed later. Teachers were interviewed individually by the researcher. Thirty minute interviews were conducted immediately following the children's drawing. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they enable more flexibility and coverage: they allowed the discussion to move into novel areas and this revealed richer data (Smith, 2003, p. 57). A teacher interview form with open ended questions was provided to each teacher so that they could prepare prior to the interview (see Appendix A). A literature review was conducted prior to the preparation of the semi-structured interview content to ensure it encompassed current research and gaps in the literature. All participants gave prior consent to taking part in the project. Anonymity and confidentiality of answers was ensured.

### **Procedure**

The research project was carried out over six weeks with one class participating per week. The researcher conducted the experimental study in the first lesson (8am to 9am). The experiment was conducted in the classroom where the student participants took all their lessons. Before starting the experiment, the researcher explained the purposes of the study to

the participants. The researcher prepared some pictures (for example, solo or group performances, school concert, popular concert, traditional Chinese concert) and presented these by PowerPoint to give the student participants drawing ideas. The children were asked to draw pictures of their lessons, or of concerts that they participated in or concerts at school or outside school. Each student in the class had 60 minutes to complete the picture and they could draw using their choice of color and medium. Students sat at a table with clean sheet of A4 paper. The instructions stated: "Please fill the paper with a visual image (drawings, colors, symbols) of a musical lesson or events". These instructions were not further specified so that the participants could create their own interpretations which they found personally meaningful, with either realistic or abstract images. Given the age of the students, they were old enough to complete the survey unaided and articulated their thoughts without help from their teachers. This was preferred because the data was not influenced by the researcher and instead reflects the children's' own thoughts and feelings. After drawing, the children were asked to describe what they drew by writing down a few words on the page to that effect.

### **Thematic analysis**

These images were analyzed using thematic analysis. Bryman (2012) stated that thematic analysis was one of the most common approaches to qualitative data analysis. He identified a 'theme' as "a category identified by the analyst through his/her data ... [it] must be relevant

to the investigation's research questions or research focus" (p. 580). Qualitative information was coded first and then themes were distilled at a more abstract level (Boyatzis, 1998). Thus, the process of thematic analysis was more complex than merely counting words or phrases. The focus was on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data (themes) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Codes were typically created by direct reference to raw data and were used as summary markers for later analysis. For example, one code is SA01-01. The 'S' denotes student, the 'A' denotes School A, '01' denotes Class 1 and '-01' denotes Student 1. So that SA02-01 means that first student came from school A and class 2 and SB01-01 is code for first student from school B and class 1, and so on.

A single code might translate into a single theme but it was more common that a theme represented a cluster of related codes. Thematic analysis was thus asserted to be the most useful method for capturing "complexities of meaning within a textual data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This form of thematic analysis was well-established (Bland, 2012; Cobb, 2012; Rätty et al., 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Inductive reasoning was used when exploring the pattern and themes evident in the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). These initial categories were later reviewed in order to consolidate key reoccurring themes that emerged from the data (Daha-Oliel et al., 2012). Themes emerged as the drawings were reviewed individually and collectively (Walker, 2008). This perspective of allowing themes to emerge from drawings is well-matched to the current research (Einarsdottir, Dockett & Perry, 2009). By

analyzing the text and its thematic structure insight was gained “into its texture”, and an understanding was developed regarding how the writer made clear to us the nature of his underlying concerns (Halliday, 1994, p. 67). Themes thus represented different windows giving different vantage points into understanding “a participant’s attempts to project his or her perception of the reality of the experiential field onto the reader” (Halliday, 1994 , p. 67).

This project focused on the main question: how do children’s drawings show their perceptions of and engagement with music? Additional factors that influenced this included gender, the location, type of music engagement, and cultural environment. These factors were reflected in the themes that emerged from the data.

### **Trustworthiness and Authenticity**

In small-scale qualitative research it is essential to address the issues of trustworthiness and authenticity which include credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Shenton, 2004). Before considering these four issues the question of “fairness” in research must be addressed. Lincoln and Guba (1986) defined “fairness” as a balanced view that presents all possible concepts and the values that underpin them. There were three steps achieving the fairness criterion: (1) provision of fairness, (2) negotiation of recommendations, and 3) carried out with their representatives at conclusion of the data-gathering, analysis and interpretation stage of evaluation. In this study, the teacher interviews were transcribed

verbatim and analyzed thematically. This was performed in accordance with Lincoln and Guba's (1986) proposed concept of educative authentication. This suggests that "the evaluator sought confirmation from participants about their understanding" (p. 82). By collecting both verbal and pictorial data the participating children could provide authentic representations of their perceptions (Dockett & Perry, 2004). Einarsdottir, Dockett, and Perry (2009) saw the advantages of drawing and asked children to draw, encouraging them to address issues that were relevant to them, and in a way that was meaningful for them. When engaged in conversations with children, drawing can provide a focus that enables children to interact on their own terms. For example, by having something to do when interacting with others. The findings from Einarsdottir et al. 2009 can be matched to Lincoln and Guba's (1986) "axiom" that concerns the relationship between researcher and respondent. It is argued that when properly established, it is one of respectful negotiation, joint control, and reciprocal learning. Lincoln and Guba's (1986) construct of credibility is one of most important factors in establishing trustworthiness. Shenton (2004) addressed fourteen of the provisions for establishing credibility and trustworthiness as described by Lincoln and Guba (1986). For transferability, Shenton (2004) stated that the concern often lies in demonstrating that the results of the work at hand can be applied to a wider population. The results of this small-scale study are not transferable to the wider population but the indicative findings offer insight into children's thinking. Shenton (2004) believed that to be dependable the study

should be reported in detail. The results of this study arose out of overlapping methods such as the focus group (children from two schools) and individual interviews (six qualified primary teachers). Regarding confirmability, Shenton (2004) argued that this concept is the qualitative investigator's major concern for objectivity. For example, the teachers in this study believed that it was important to understand that children's drawing might offer insight into their feelings and thoughts. This research is based on trustworthiness and authenticity of qualitative research rather than addressing the concepts of validity and reliability. This study can be considered in the context of Guba's four criteria for qualitative research in pursuit of trustworthiness.

### **Findings**

Themes emerged from analysis including words accompanying drawings, drawings, the music learning environment, gender, a continuum of relationship with music, teachers' perspectives, and perceptual development. These themes were reflected on by the teachers and interpreted by the researcher.

#### **Words accompanying drawings**

Children's short statements were first coded (Jolley, Fenn & Jones, 2004) and encompassed a range of understandings. When listed separately there were 142 codes; the most common are

listed in Table 1.

**Table 1** *Most highly used written statements accompanying student drawings*

<b>Four categories and other</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
I participated in a musical concert/event at school	45.70%
forms of music engagement	42.20%
I participated in a musical concert/event outside school	6.30%
cultural values	4.20%
makes you have a better life	4.20%

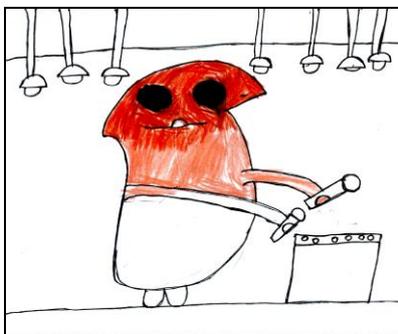
Clusters of linked statements expressed similar meanings. These were grouped under four themes that are discussed in descending frequency. The largest cluster of statements described general musical engagement such as “I participated in a musical concert/event at school” (45.7%). The next category identified the forms of music engagement, such as playing, singing and dancing (42.2%); all of which fall under Small’s (1998) concept of musicking. Small (1998) defined musicking as all the processes involved in the preparation and execution of a performance. Small (1998) suggested that these processes are “not separate processes but are all aspects of the one great human activity” (p. 11). A third category was non-school events (6.3%) and the fourth identified “cultural values” (4.2%) (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1** *A person sat on a big car playing a violin with other instruments accompanying him in the rear*



The remaining responses used stereotypic cartoon characters such as a ‘mushroom’ playing the drum (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2** *A ‘mushroom’ playing the drum*



Several responses conveyed affective understandings such as music “makes me happy” (1 child); music is “fun” (2 children) and “enjoyable” (2 children). Other responses conveyed spiritual ideas such as music “makes you have a better life” (4.2%). There was considerable agreement between the themes as revealed by the words and by the pictures.

## **Drawings**

The children's images were thematically analyzed (Huss, Kaufman & Siboni, 2014). Children's pictures can be grouped according to task-action, task-symbolic and holistic representations (Creech & Hallam, 2006). Task-action involved students depicting themselves in their drawings as reacting to music and/or interacting with musical instruments. Task-symbolic involved the use of symbolic imagery such as music notes and staff without accompanying human figures, for example, a solitary trombone with a music stand. In holistic drawing the illustrator used a broad perspective to associate music with the environment, for example, one image showed a soprano recorder surrounded by musical notation and a large rainbow. These three categorizations were applied to the 136 pictures; 123 images were classified as task-action; 12 images task-symbolic; and only 1 image holistic. Images were analyzed to explore students' experiences of interpersonal and intrapersonal interaction while performing/playing. Drawings were sorted by image content and it is possible to recognize the extent of emotional engagement with the musical program.

There were 31 images which depicted "music making," sometimes combining more than one form of engagement. These were singing (17 images), singing with instruments accompaniment (12 images), and singing with dancing (2 images). Holiday et al., (2009) identified four features in children's drawings: facial expressions, accentuation of body

features, colors used, and sense of self. The child's intention in drawing was significant: the picture might intentionally exaggerate or in other ways be unrealistic (Cobb, 2012). According to Holiday et al., (2009), the facial expressions that children drew were powerfully able to convey emotions. Regarding accentuation of body features, one example image showed a girl holding a microphone with her mouth open and a big smile. With respect to the colors used, many students' drawings showed the colors of the rainbow (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3** *Girl playing an ocarina with the bright colors of the rainbow in the background*



Drawings that contained bright colors evoked positivity, creativity and vitality (Fury, 1996). Surprisingly many pictures did not explicitly depict the drawer. For example, some pictures depicted several students on stage without specifying which one was the drawer. This might indicate a diminished sense of self for this age (Holiday et al., 2009) or it might indicate a healthy group-based sense of identity as encouraged in Taiwanese schools.

Many classroom music instruments were depicted in the drawings (see Table 2). In total, there were 200 musical instruments drawn in a variety of settings. Images of soprano

recorders appeared most frequently (75 images, 37%), then drums (33 images, 16%), violins and piano were equal third (17 images, 8% each). Compulsory learning of soprano recorder had a strong impact on students.

**Table 2** *Drawings of various musical instruments*

<b>Musical instruments</b>	<b>Category &amp; Number of images</b>
Strings	guitar (13), bass guitar (1), electric guitar (3), ukulele guitar (1)
	violin (17), cello (8), double bass (1), harpsichord (3)
Winds	soprano recorder (75)
	trumpet (1), trombone (1), French horn (1), saxophone (2), harmonic (1)
percussion	drum (33), a drum kit (6)
	maracas (7), cymbal (1), triangle (1), castanets (1), ocarina (1)
	xylophone (1), gong (1)
keyboard	piano (17), melodic (1)
other	musical glasses (1)

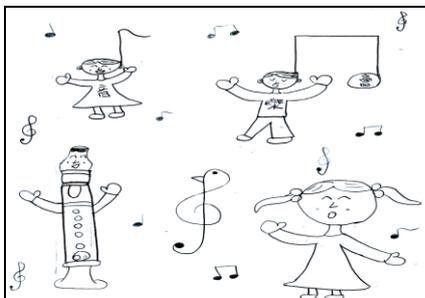
Most of the drawings depicted a child accompanied by musical notations (46 images). Notational symbols were mainly decorative, for example as a border. Some drawings had no symbols, 3 had a few (<5) and 43 had many. Most common were crotchets (34 images) and quavers (44 images); these symbols were commonly combined (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4** Image showing a soprano recorder and recorder bag surrounded by a treble clef, musical notes, and staff notation



One image included a treble clef as a bird and a soprano recorder coming alive, waving its hands (see Figure 5). Students also included colored lighting (13), microphones (6), speakers (3), sparkle machines (2), audiences (4), and the general stage environment (39).

**Figure 5** Image showing music notes embodying children



Fifty-eight images included multiple people and showed shared activity indicating that students understood that music making was a shared social activity. Most images featured children at school. Images included conductors leading violin players, singing with drum accompaniment, and a group of five singers and four instrumental players surrounded by

floating music notes. Another image showed two boys and two girls, the former played drums and violin, the latter played harpsichord and sang, performing on stage with overhead lights to a packed concert hall (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6** *Children performing on the stage with lights hanging over their heads to a packed concert hall*



### **The music learning environment**

Several images depicted specific details of the multifunction stage in the school hall. Most children depicted players with different instruments, singing or dancing, but some showed other details. Figure 7 has many details including a stage with stairs, two sparkle machines and colored lighting. Images representing school events included one with large girl figure wearing a colorful evening gown with high heeled shoes on a stage. The background of the stage was a wall of bright colors and before the singer were floating musical notes and staff notation. Many children preferred to draw musical notes to represent the sounds coming from the music concert, as if it was underway. Musical notes also commonly represented sounds from instruments playing or singing.

**Figure 7** *More details on stage with stairs, and even pairs of sparkle machines and colored lighting*

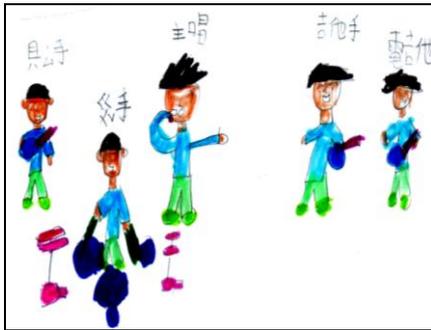


## Gender

Unsurprisingly the images of boys and girls were in proportion with the class profile (66 girls and 70 boys). Gender was indeterminate in only one image. More girls than boys drew themselves playing the soprano recorders. The majority of the boys and girls drew themselves solitary and smiling, in school or out of school (59 of 66 girls; 55 of 70 boys). The girls' pictures (57%) showed group performance; the boys (44%). Seven boys' pictures showed concerts outside school whereas the girls did not. The girls' images (77%) portrayed school concerts more than boys (57%). The girls' images overall contained more life-like depictions than the boys', but this might have been reflection of developmental standard rather than an indication of how they understood music.

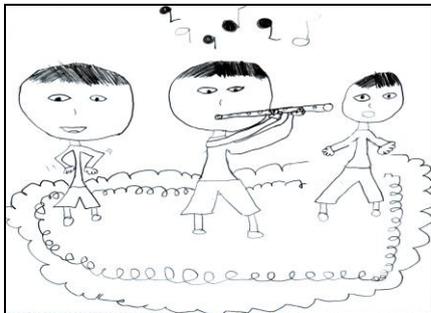
One drawing by a boy showed a public concert with five rock stars, identified by name, and included bass, acoustic, and electric guitarists, drummer, and lead vocalist (see Figure 8).

**Figure 8** Child drew five rock stars and identified by name



Another image depicted three boys, one blowing the soprano recorder and the other two singing and dancing. In another drawing, three boys smiled broadly and one boy wiggled his body which might be influenced by YouTube clips or a film (see Figure 9).

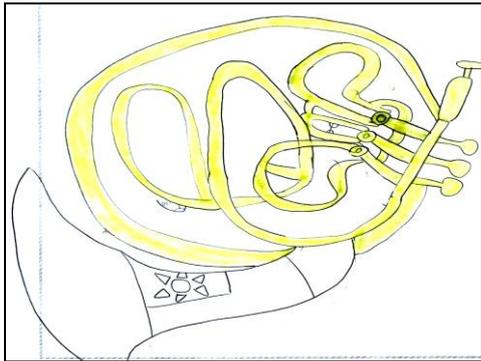
**Figure 9** Three boys flashing a big smile and one boy wiggling his body



Two boys showed aspirational music making, portraying a drum kit as their preferred instruments. One boy had black glasses and brown hair with very 'cool' facial expression, another picture showed a school boy practicing with a drum kit. One boy presented not only

his favorite instrument – French horn – but also drew the Taiwanese flag to show his patriotism (see Figure 10).

**Figure 10** *Boy presenting not only his favorite instrument – French horn – but also drawing the Taiwanese flag to show his patriotism*



Another drew himself grinning broadly while playing the violin and a boy stood behind him with the same facial expression. In 66 images girls drew only a female figure but two girls' drawings were exceptions. One showed a girl who drew four boys (two singing and two playing recorder) and a girl playing maracas (see Figure 11). Another girl drew two boys playing recorders outside the classroom with a moon above them. Unlike the boys, no girl drew an orchestral instrument.

**Figure 11** *A girl who draws four boys and one girl making music*



### **Continuum of relationship with music**

Features emphasized by students were key to analysis (Bland, 2012). There was a continuum of relationship with the music stretching from “me becoming the music” through to musical depictions without an overt reference to self (see Table 3).

**Table 3** *Continuum of relationship with music*

Me immersion in music	Me making music	Me listening to music	Me surrounded by music	Me but no music	Music but no me
1	85	41	47	1	11

Moving from left to right along the continuum, “me making music” there were 85 images. The next group (41) was smiling and/or engaged in listening to music. Most of these images showed concerts or events. The next 47 were smiling and/or surrounded by musical symbols. All images of ‘me’ were happy. Most drawings (67%) showed children making

music. The drawings were action focused; 7% had no child and focused solely on instruments.

Of these 8 showed the instruments creating music; two had instruments hovering.

### **Teachers' perspectives**

Six primary teachers aged twenty-five to forty were interviewed. Their average amount of teaching experience was 6+ years. The semi-structured interview sought their understandings of the benefits of using children's drawing to enhance perceptual development. Teachers were also asked to respond to questions regarding gender, the location, type of music engagement, and cultural environment. Their responses were recorded then sorted thematically. The resulting themes built upon and expanded pre-existing research on children's drawing and perceptual development.

### **Perceptual development**

In this study the children created their own interpretations of what was seen and felt, producing pictures that were meaningful to themselves. The teachers were surprised by the children's abilities. Teacher A said, "I did not know our students could draw from their experiences in music making or attending concerts. I encouraged our students to attend various activities outside school, and enhanced their self expression and self-awareness." Teacher B stated, "some of my students could interpret their thoughts into picture but others

had less skill to draw.” Teachers also commented on what the children chose to draw. Teacher C stated, “most of the children drew their school music experience as solitary depictions of themselves. Only a few drew two people making music together.” Teacher D wrote, “most of our children had drawing experience as individuals or via group lessons at school or outside school. I believed that this meant they had more drawing skills than other students.” Teacher E maintained that, “my class had lots of experience in dancing and body movement through lessons which used music. Most of my children engaged with music through dancing and body movement.” Teacher F wrote, “all images portrayed school concerts but one presented a track and field stadium with four athletes and music was on during racing competition.” Overall, the teachers believed children’s drawing ability varied between individuals and that the subjects of the drawings directly reflected the children’s experiences. For example, one image was composed of two boys and two girls. The boys played drums and violin, while the girl played harpsichord and sang. They were performing to a packed concert hall. In contrast, another student drew the people in a more defined manner. Their image showed eight boys and girls; three seem to be playing instruments and five were dancing. This image drew by a girl used symbols to identify people and their action.

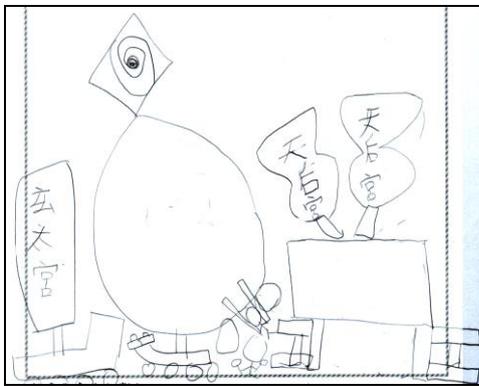
The participants felt that visual images could enhance children’s conceptual development. Children’s visual images provide poignant insight into the students’ worlds and offered a “gateway to destinations ... beyond [the researcher’s] repertoire of preconceived

understandings of place and space” (Mannay, 2010, p. 108). Children’s drawings can offer insight into their feelings and thoughts. All teachers agreed that children preferred to draw themselves and others of the same gender. Teacher B thought that two exceptions might be because “both students had a strong music memory which they drew and this overpowered the general tendency to draw one’s own gender.” Teachers A and D said that about half of the drawings showed a performance stage, place or space. Teacher F noted that most of her children’s drawings (99.9%) presented school concerts which she attributed to her school holding “many concerts or music activities for students to participate.” Teacher E stated, “there were thirteen pictures showing children’s dancing with music or dancing with singing. Some of images showed ballet dancers’ tutu and slippers.” Children engaged in music making in different ways. Teacher B stated, “there were two pictures showing concerts held in community settings but most reflected the reality of school music.” This revealed a tension between out-of-school and in-school music (Southcott & Cosaitis, 2015).

Analysis of drawings of various musical instruments made teachers realize they had underestimated the children who had a much broader understanding of music than was assumed. Teacher A said, “one picture presented a child playing an electronic bass guitar and wearing black glasses with a fashionable hair style, dress and shoes.” Every participant agreed that all of children were familiar with the soprano recorder. Some of visual images showed the influence of popular culture. Teacher A noted that three pictures depicted popular

concerts. Teachers C and D identified children's images that included cartoon fantasy. Teachers C and D described, "some children's images showed the influence of the media such as DVDs, film, and internet in homes or elsewhere." Teachers' responses confirmed the pervasive and influential presence of visual media and the internet in homes, school and community settings on children's understandings of reality and fantasy (Campbell & Wiggins, 2013). Regarding local culture, Teacher B stated, "one child's picture showed Taiwanese traditional culture, depicting a vehicle carrying people playing gongs and drums who were engaged in worshipping activity to God in front of a temple" (see Figure 12).

**Figure 12** *One child's picture showing Taiwanese traditional culture*



Teacher F emphasized, "most of our children's drawings showed that they participated in school concerts or practices. Although Western culture had an undeniably strong impact, I could still see at least one child drew themselves embedded in traditional culture." Performances offered children opportunities to learn about the world, explore new ideas and

participate in cultural activities. Cultural activities including traditional festivals, temple festivals and aboriginal rituals are important to educate and develop children's understanding of their culture.

### **Discussion**

The aim of study was to discover children's understanding of, and engagement with, music through drawing. The main question was "how do children's drawings show their perceptions of and engagement with music?" Gender, location, type of music engagement, and cultural environment were also explored. Overall not many children chose to express their feelings or perspective on what they drew, even though a wide variety of images were drawn. Children revealed less in writing than in drawing. This might reveal students' self-consciousness about using a medium that teachers could correct. This may reflect the broader teaching pedagogy of Taiwan where students are expected to be receptacles of what was taught, without identifying and expressing their own feelings and meanings (Pezzica et al., 2016). The absence of strict guidelines also gave rise to occasional contradictions between a student's image and its written text. For example, one child wrote, "I liked to listen to musical concerts at school which were played by older sisters and brothers" but drew "older sisters and brothers" as cartoon characters with big eyes or line eyes, specific animation hair styles, and playing strangely shaped instruments. Additionally, these drawings were given to the class

teacher for their reflection and comments. An interesting example from teacher reflections was that teachers were surprised their students could draw upon their experiences in music making or attending concerts. This was not dependent upon the students' drawing and writing skills. The class teacher needs to recognize and integrate drawing and writing with musical teaching and learning more often. Drawing and writing can reveal insight into students' experience in their music learning perspectives. When comparing the drawings, teachers' commented that most images reflected the reality of school music more than out-of-school. Some of the visual images showed the influence of popular culture rather than local culture. Teachers believed that they need a useful strategy to solve these problems, such as the teacher could arranging once or twice per month to attend musical events or concerts outside school. These events or concerts should involve Western, popular or local cultures.

Several themes emerged from the analysis of the drawings. Firstly, children are not only drawing musical engagement but they are active music makers. The children demonstrate their creativity by combining more than one form of engagement. This is supported by two images. One image showed a recorder and recorder bag surrounded by a treble clef, musical notes, and staff notation (see Figure 13). The boy who drew it also wrote "the recorder can play beautiful music just like a colorful rainbow". He drew a large rainbow to present his idea. The second significant image showed music notes embodying children: the quaver was their heads. A treble clef was turned into a bird and a recorder had come to life, waving its own hands (see Figure 5). Secondly,

most of the images were based at school and can be found in two images: one is in the largest cluster of statements described general musical engagement such as “I participated in a musical concert/event at school” (45.7%). Another supportive evidence is that Teacher B stated that most images reflected the reality of school music. A third theme to emerge was an interesting contrast described by the following two statements: (1) under drawing theme the students demonstrated a diminished sense of self and (2) under gender theme the students only drew themselves. The former statement describes many images that did not explicitly depict the drawer in the writing text and there were more than one people in the image. It could be that the student did not want to indicate himself/herself. The second statement is self-explanatory, and encompasses images in which the students obviously only drew themselves. A fourth theme was that children’s engagement with school music can be seen in their participation in class or school hall and heard in their playing and speaking. Children’s understanding of music can be intimated from their participation in and responses to activities, such as singing, dancing, instrumental playing, composing and improvising with others or by themselves (Cosaitis, 2012, p. 165). Children may describe their interpretations of music in simple phrases. For example, music “makes me happy”, music is “fun” and “enjoyable”. These responses can be seen under “words accompanying drawings” theme. At the beginning of the research, the class teachers reminded their children that they were going to see children’s drawing and written statement. It might be that children prefer to draw a smiling face for their teacher or they would try to please the teacher, and so only draw and write positive things. The fifth theme to emerge was the difference between the

incidence of community vs. school music. The findings suggested that school has a larger influence on the children which can be found in the children's short statements and also teacher's illustration. For example, Teacher F emphasized that, "most of our children's drawings showed that they participated in school concerts or making music ... we could still see at least one child depicting themselves as embedded in traditional culture." Teachers all agreed that the school provided a broad range of musical programs and activities.

The findings demonstrated that combining art with music education could offer useful insights into how children understood and engaged with music. This finding affirmed the research of Southcott and Cosaitis (2015) that showed children understood and engaged with music, and concluded that the value of drawing was very similar in schools everywhere. Children in Australia saw themselves as part of a musical world that was wider than the confines of the classroom (Southcott & Cosaitis, 2015). Creech and Hallam (2006) found that students' drawings conveyed authentic "accounts of the outcomes experienced by students, including enjoyment of music, personal satisfaction, motivation, self-efficacy, self esteem and friendship". Aspects of local Taiwanese culture were conveyed in this study. For example, there was one boy who drew a picture with a local culture event. Southcott and Cosaitis (2015) showed a boy in an open space gazing into the distance with the name of his football team in a "think bubble" above his head while he listened to his iPod. This drawing depicted the location of Australia and the use of technology for music engagement. Pictures from

Taiwanese students showed a wider range instruments, probably because the big school (which had five classes participating in this research) emphasized a broad range of musical programs and activities.

There were similarities between these two studies. In both all students were happy when they made music by themselves or in interaction with others. This was identified from their facial expressions. Enjoyment was a key reason why children were motivated to engage in certain learning activities (Hallam, 2010). Both this study and the Australia study showed a variety of children's music making. Other similarities between these two studies were that children reflected adult music such as rock guitar, rock singer, or included popular media images of girls performing. This demonstrates that children are not only influenced by classroom music, but also by popular music that they consume outside of school. It seems both students and teachers benefit from this research. Students gain much from the integration of music, and teachers should take advantage of this knowledge to extend school

### **Conclusion**

This research has revealed how children think about music engagement by asking them to draw a picture with accompanying written statement. The words were not very revealing but the pictures showed a range of responses, mostly school related but some depicting the wider community. The pictures universally showed happy children but this might have been

reflection of the children's awareness that their teachers would see their work. To avoid this issue, students' voices should be listened to, and engaged with. This can be achieved through drawing in a non-judgmental environment. What the pictures do reveal is that for the children 'music' means making – actively taking part in music. Children also depicted themselves reacting to music and/or interacting with musical instruments. The significance of these findings is that children are not only drawing musical engagement but they are also making music (combining more than one form of engagement) through their imagination or creativity. Classroom teachers should offer support or organize different settings for children to present their musical engagements. Teachers should also encourage children to attend concerts or various activities and to take some pictures or information brochures. Afterwards, children need to reflect through drawing, writing, pottery or other activity which can enhance their perceptions of music. The children are not passive receptors but musickers. For school music educators this suggests that class music should be a time of active music engagement as this is what the children value and what they will remember as significant in their schooling.

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**Appendix A** *Teacher interview form*

- (1) What do you think about children creating their own interpretations of their perceptions and producing pictures that were meaningful to themselves?
- (2) What do you think about children's short statements accompanying the drawings?
- (3) What do you think about children's musical learning/performing environment?
- (4) What do you think about portrayal of gender in children's drawing?
- (5) What type of music engagement is presented in children's drawing?
- (6) What do you think about children's drawing show the influence of their cultural environment?
- (7) What forms of music engagement are there (singing, dancing, playing, moving etc.)?
- (8) What other pieces of information do you want to supplement?