

# Examining Kindergarteners' Drawings for Their Perspectives on Picture Books' Themes and Characters

Ching-Yuan Hsiao<sup>1</sup> & Chi-Mei Chen<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Early Childhood Education, National University of Tainan, Tainan, Taiwan

<sup>2</sup> Tainan Municipal Da-Shin Elementary School, Taiwan

Correspondence: Ching-Yuan Hsiao, Department of Early Childhood Education, National University of Tainan. Address: 33, Sec. 2, Shu-Lin St., Tainan 700, Taiwan. Tel: 886-929-704-0353. E-mail: cyh111@mail.nutn.edu.tw

Received: April 30, 2015 Accepted: June 5, 2015 Online Published: October 27, 2015

doi:10.5539/ies.v8n11p40

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ies.v8n11p40>

## Abstract

The aim of this study was to identify and characterize children's perspectives on a picture book's themes and characters by examining their drawings. The study was conducted over a five-month period in a public kindergarten in southern Taiwan, with six children aged 5-6 years. Picture book appreciation activities focused on eight picture books. Research data were collected via digital recordings of participants' appreciation and art-making activities, interviews, and associate teachers' feedback. A qualitative research method was used to process and analyze data. Study results indicate that with regard to theme, children could clearly identify and characterize a story's theme but seldom offered in-depth interpretations. With regard to character, children could describe a picture book character's outward appearance and inner feelings but could not present its inner feelings in their drawings. These and other findings from this study could aid early childhood educators in conducting picture book appreciation activities in the future.

**Keywords:** comprehension, characters, drawings, themes

## 1. Introduction

In the learning process for children, pictures, texts, drawings, and language are some of the most important routes for adults to transmit education to children and to teach children how to absorb new information (Su, 1998). For preschool children who are unable to fully comprehend the meaning of texts and express their internal feelings with words, pictures are undoubtedly one of the best ways to make an impression. Drawings made by children at different ages are an important reference to their mental development (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987), as drawing is one of the best ways to express feelings. Through the lines, shapes, space, and colors in a picture, children can freely express their feelings. Drawing also provides a vent for the child's emotions, while at the same time making an impact on their cognition, thoughts, perception, sense, and judgment (Lin, 2006). It can be seen that introducing picture books has a positive impact on children's understanding of stories. However, previous researches in this field in Taiwan are now outdated as both social and teaching environments have undergone significant changes in recent years. The findings of previous researches now have little reference value. Therefore, it is now time for researchers, using action research methods, to investigate the effects of using picture book introduction activities in kindergartens to improve children's comprehension of the stories' themes and characters. This research attempts to use picture books as a medium in kindergarten teaching settings and to design introduction teaching activities. The targets of the research are 20 children aged between 5 and 6. The children are introduced to the stories through themed picture books. They are also encouraged to observe, discuss, and appreciate the artistic expressions of the drawings. The goal is to heighten the children's observation and comprehension skills and to investigate their levels of understanding of themes and characters. Study results will affect early childhood educators' selection of picture books when engaging young children in appreciating picture book activities.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Educational Value of Picture Books to Young Children

Huang and Hsu (2004) also stated that interesting picture books can motivate children's desire to read, and thus help them to attain good learning outcomes. Moreover, cultivating solid reading comprehension for children will

lead them to the door of learning, and a child's lifelong reading plan starts with their educators (Kou, 2011). Reading is the basis for learning and the ages of 3 to 8 are a critical period for laying the foundations for self-reading (National Research Council, 1998). For children, the early promotion of reading is one of the basic skills required for learning other subjects. Hirsh-Pasek and Golinkoff (2003) point out that the stories in picture books can help children develop skills and learn important concepts in a natural and unforced way. Debby (2007) believes picture books are easily accessible and can stimulate cognition and encourage sentimental values. Many scholars have also highlighted the educational value and function of picture books; for instance, picture books can help to improve cognitive learning, language development, aesthetics, living experience, social adaptability, interest in reading and parental relationships, creative thinking, emotional acceptance and relief, and promote a kind heart in children (Cheng, 2003; Cheng, 2005; Hsiao, 2010; Hsu, 2002; Jalongo, 1988; Lin, 2008; Lu, 2013; Su, 2002; Tadashi, 2008; Yang & Cheng, 2012; Zeece, 2000). Because of the aforementioned functions and values, and due to the variety of topics in picture books, more and more researchers have begun to use them as teaching media.

### *2.2 Young Children's Mental, Emotional, and Social Development*

Piaget's most important contribution to the understanding of cognitive development was his identification of children as meaning makers (Kuhn, 1992). Children's thoughts seem to occur on the basis of their direct experiences and comprehension of the present moment (Huck, Helper, Hickman, & Kiefer, 2006). During early childhood, it is difficult for a child to grasp that different images may represent the same thing as it changes shape or form (Huck et al., 2006). Older children who are capable of following the more complicated logic of stories can remember the episodes that occur in them without help (Huck et al., 2006). Furthermore, Lowenfeld and Brittain (1987) noted that children in the Pre-Schematic stage only draw the outlines of figures, focusing on the details of important objects in their mind, and they also claimed that children's creativity will be harmed if adults intervene in their drawing. In contrast, Kindler (1995) found that when adults work with children in activities aimed at creating or appreciating art, then this can be helpful rather than harmful to the children's development. Kindler (1995) also showed that appropriate intervention when children are producing art can help in their artistic development. Wilson and Wilson (1982) also noted that children's drawings borrow from various media, and thus they need to learn the pictorial forms that adults use if they are to achieve artistic development. Huck et al. (2006) have also found that student s' cultural and social backgrounds, as well as their proficiency with regard to a specific situation or task, might affect their thinking. When children create pictorial forms mainly by observing the work of others, as happens in the early stages of their artistic development, they will not only pay attention to the images, but also to how they are created, as well as any symbolic forms, and how these are used by adults (Kindler, 1995; Wilson & Wilson, 1977, 1987). Furthermore, Ho (2004) also stated when children make drawings they borrow or transform from other media, modifying pictorial forms that are used by older children or adults, and then create their own ones. And, teachers and parents play a vital role in guiding children during this developmental procedure (Ho, 2004). In addition, educators can thus consider how students' thinking patterns are connected to the picture books they like, and to their responses to the related texts and pictures (Huck et al., 2006).

### *2.3 Examining Young Children's Comprehension of Picture Books through Drawings*

When educators use picture storybooks with classes, they can motivate children to observe and note on following things: What the picture book writer includes in the illustration, such as the characters, settings, and objects. Where objects are in the illustration: the location of objects can indicate, among other things, their relative significance. How the images are made: the media and style used to create the illustrations (Stewig, 1995). Lowenfeld (1947) pointed out that young children's drawings can reflect the traits of children's emotions, intelligence, physiology, perception, sociality, aesthetics, and creativity. Young children's drawings are also often regarded as a mirror that reflects their mental development (Cherney et al., 2006). Therefore, drawing is the most direct artistic activity that expresses a child's thoughts and emotions. When drawing, children often transmit their inner thoughts and feelings subconsciously, whilst at the same time recreating their living experiences (Hsiao, 2010). Therefore, by understanding the drawings, we can learn more about the children and, according to their needs, provide the most appropriate guidance and cultivation of their reading ability. A complete picture book usually contains several elements, such as theme, characters, background, viewpoints, and style (Lin, 2008). Sawyer and Comer (1995) also point out that the analysis of a picture book is usually done from specific aspects, such as theme, character depiction, background, style, and page layout. Hsiao and Shih (2015) study noted that Mariko Shinju's Mottainai Grandma is a thrifty person, and the theme of picture book, Mottainai Grandma, is teaching readers how to save water, food, and electricity. According to the aforementioned study, the investigation of children's artistic comprehension and impression of picture books can be done in steps, such as

analysing the themes and characters depicted in children's drawings.

#### *2.4 Examining Young Children's Understanding of Picture Book's Themes and Characters through Drawings*

The theme of a picture storybook demonstrates the author's aim in creating the story (Huck et al., 2006). The picture book's writer may try to express, through a picture book, the themes of morality, value, faith, feeling, and living attitude (Lin, 2008). Moreover, the theme of a picture storybook may be accepting oneself or others, or giving knowledge to children that is correct and honest. And, sound ethical and moral standards should convince children to be well behaved (Huck et al., 2006). There are three main methods to draw on for a picture book's theme: 1. Self-narration; 2. Conversations among characters within the book; metaphors or hints; and 3. Metaphors that are the most invisible, formative method of influence (Cheng, 2005). Lin (2008) believes that themes could be drawn both explicitness and implicitness. The explicit method points out the main idea at the end of the story. In contrast, the implicit method means the author hides the theme in the storyline, the method by which most picture books are presented. Therefore, a correct and healthy story theme could inspire children and unconsciously cultivate them in truth, goodness, and aesthetic (Salisbury, 2004). Using children's drawings to investigate this, the main idea is that picture books expect to express, and we would then know how much the children understand the theme by investigating their understanding of the picture book's characters through drawings (Lin, 2013).

Sawyer and Comer (1995) thought that a character was the soul of a picture book. It could be a human, an animal, a subject, even an imaginary subject. However, the feeling and action of a character must give people the realistic feeling that readers can glimpse their own self and have an emotional connection with the story characters (Sawyer, 2004). Sometimes when children see emotional illustrations these will move them and they will thus sympathize with the characters' feelings (Lin, 2013). In presenting a character, a picture book author may do so through narration, recording the character's discourse with others, showing their ideas or the thoughts of others about the character, or the character in action (Huck et al., 2006). Moreover, a character could be shaped not only by dress, appearance, facial expression and postures but also from interaction, conversation, thinking, actions among characters and decisions they make in order to transmit the nature of their roles (Tsai, 2011). Even so, the picture book's author can catch the readers' interest and attention by means of exaggerated characters and situations. The use of exaggerated characters or unbelievable storylines can create interesting picture books (Lin, 2013). When the characters portrayed are similar to the readers' mental state or behaviour, it is much easier to create a response (Cheng, 2005). Using children's drawings to investigate a picture book character's appearance, facial expression, postures, feeling, and interaction among characters, it is possible to know how much the children understand the characters (Hsiao, 2010). Lin (2008) stated that if illustrators draw characters in an artistic and individual manner, it can assist children to understand the characters. In addition, Kim (2008) conducted a study of how children chose to draw a story, she found that they borrowed characters from animation and then developed a new story by changing the character's appearance.

#### *2.5 Research Questions*

Research Question One: How do children comprehend a picture book's theme through the picture books' appreciation activities (i.e. drawing, group discussion, and interview)?

Research Question Two: How do children comprehend a picture book's characters through the picture books' appreciation activities (i.e. drawing, group discussion, and interview)?

### **3. Research Methodology**

The aim of the research was to examine how children understand a picture book's theme and characters through the children's drawings. The research site was a public preschool in Taiwan. The researcher collected information on the appreciation of the picture books and drawing activities using audio recordings, video recordings, and taking photographs.

#### *3.1 Participants*

This research used purposive sampling and chose six children from a kindergarten in southern Taiwan as the research targets. The teachers assisting in the research, instructor May, graduated with a master degree in preschool education and have ten years of teaching experience in kindergarten. They are also interested in picture books and took part in this research as assistant observers and recorders. They have also counterchecked the data validity. The researcher has often exchanged their thoughts and opinions of the research with instructor May. The researcher did a pilot study at the beginning of the semester, and found that some of the students had the experience of reading a book with their parents, while others liked to do reading activities with their teachers or peers, and some of them only liked to watch the DVDs that came with certain picture books.

### 3.2 Research Tools

Two types of research tool were used in this study: (1). The picture books employed in the study were all prize-winning books that had been translated into Chinese. The theme-based approach is the most popular kindergarten curriculum approach in Taiwan (Hsiao, 2014), and these picture books were chosen for their focus on ecological issues, as this was the main theme of the fall semester in our 2013 curriculum. The final list of eight picture books was generated following discussions with professionals in the field, and these included: *The Thrifty Grandma*, *Der Junge und der Fisch*, *Diary of a Worm*, *The Changing Countryside*, *Change in One Second*, *Escape from the Mountain*, *Petit ours sur la banquise*, and *Look after Your Planet*. (2). A check list for the picture books' comprehension was constructed. The three components of the story check list, used to observe children's understanding of picture books, were themes, characters, and interaction of characters, as indicated by Sawyer and Comer (1995) and Wang (2008).

### 3.3 Research procedure—Teaching Activity Design and Implementation

The researcher designed several teaching goals and curriculum according to the eight picture books selected. Every Monday morning between December and April in 2013, the targets were exposed to "Introduction to Picture Books" and "Theme and Characters Discussion" activities. On Tuesday mornings, the children were each asked to depict the story as a drawing and to describe their drawings, all of which were recorded. It was 8 weeks between December and April with two sessions each week. And, the research was spread out over 16 sessions with a different story planned each week. The recordings of these activities were used for collecting data on the teaching.

### 3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection in this research included observation records, interview records, children's drawings, teachers' feedback logs, and feedback from homeroom teachers. The data was consistently analyzed and summarized, with the validity verified through triangulation.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

Research Question One: How do children comprehend a picture book's theme through the picture books' appreciation activities?

### 4.1 Children's Understanding of Picture Books' Story Themes

Using picture books to understand the stories' themes through the art-talks, the results were as below:

#### 4.1.1 Able To Clearly and Correctly Describe the Story Themes

The eight books that the researcher selected were environmental education related picture books and it was discovered that children could, mostly, clearly and correctly describe the theme that each picture book was expected to discuss. For instance, *The Thrifty Grandma* emphasises ideas about rubbish and recycling. When children observed the picture book, they made the following comments:

C3: Do not waste goods and food, we should recycle as much as the thrifty grandma.

C6: Did not waste goods! Or we would be blamed by grandma.

The book, *Der Junge und der Fisch*, mentioned the viewpoint of loving animals and protecting them. When children observed the picture book, they made the following comments:

C1: We should take care of animals or they will disappear from the earth.

C4: If you love animals, please do not hurt them.

In the book, *Escape from the Mountain*, children considered the causality between consumers and creatures, and were further aware of the idea that humans throw away too much rubbish and pollute the earth they are living on and that animals could disappear. When children observed the picture book, they made the following comments:

C2: We have bought lots of things and have thrown them away without using them. A lot of waste is made and animals do not have a place to live.

C4: We throw away lots of rubbish and send it to be burnt. It then pollutes the environment and animals could die.

The book *Petit ours sur la banquise* reminds everyone to care about the risk of global warming. When children observed the picture book, they made the following comments:

C1: If the ice melted, polar bears would have no place to live! If the polar bears disappear, we could disappear

too.

C2: We must protect the earth, and must help to slow the ice melting! Let the polar bears live on the earth forever!

The book, *Diary of a Worm*, made children see the world from a different viewpoint and understand the contribution earthworms make to the earth. When children observed the picture book, they made the following comments:

C1: Even though earthworms are tiny, they could protect the earth! Therefore, we have to take care of them.

C6: Earthworms can dig soil and make the environment healthy.

The book, *The Changing Countryside*, helped the children understand how the bad influences from the development of land and the construction of cities causes poor residential environment quality. When children observed the picture book, they made the following comments:

C1: People operate bobcats to cut down the woods; to set up factories; to build high buildings; all of these actions have destroyed our living place.

C3: Excavators have destroyed woods, fields, and made muddy roads, and the countryside could disappear.

The book, *Change in One Second*, mentioned that the earth was facing the risk of being destroyed and emphasised the point that being environmentally friendly could save the earth. When children observed the picture book, they made the following comments:

C2: If we throw rubbish away at will, the earth could be polluted in one second.

C6: If people kill the animals at will, it could cause all wild animals to disappear from the world.

The book, *Look after Your Planet*, made children understand the importance of protecting our precious planet and to love the earth. When children observed the picture book, they made the following comments:

C3: We should recycle and then we would not pollute the earth in this way.

C5: We should take care of our ONLY earth and take the following actions: not throw rubbish away at will; turn off lights when we do not use them; use the lift less.

The researcher used easy and repetitive language, practiced the appreciation activity repeatedly, and combined with interesting games. During mutual discussions and brain storming, the children were able to quickly understand a story's theme and present it in drawings. This result was the same as Ko (2011); by applying a proper reading strategy, for instance, fun games, discussions, and watching films, it is possible to increase children's reading comprehension capabilities. Huck et al. (2006) stated that instruct a healthy story theme could inspire children and unconsciously cultivate in them the qualities of truth, goodness, ethics, morals, and aesthetics. The themes of the picture books selected for this research were all related to environmental protection and were close to children's living experiences, and all their drawings were related to the story themes. The result was the same stated by Hsiao (2010); when a picture book's concept is presented as a living experience, children have more experience at an understandable level. Most children could express the theme according to the meaning the author tried to transmit in the study. Furthermore, picture books encourage students to probe their own memories, and show how certain images can enable them remembers past events (Evans, 1998).

#### 4.2 Children Seldom Have an In-depth Analysis and Interpretation of Themes

According to this research, children's expression of themes through drawings was mostly focused on conversations among characters or only caring about the surface of the events. Sometimes, children might use macro viewpoints extending to insightful responses, such as they figured out the concept of love and to protect the earth, as taken from the books, *The Thrifty Grandma* and *Look after Your Planet*; These mentioned how being environmentally friendly could save the earth.

Hsiao (2010) also stated how children interpret themes that are limited to the picture books' contents. Moreover, it also confirmed Lu's (2013) statement that pre-operational stage children often focus on certain details that catch their attention. Children might ignore the deep meaning of a theme as they lack prior experience or knowledge and are only able to express the images. In addition, Lowenfeld and Brittain (1987) noted that children in the pre-schematic stage only pay attention to the important objects in their mind.

*Research Question Two: How do children comprehend a picture book's characters through the picture books' appreciation activities?*

### 4.3 Children's Understanding of a Picture Book's Characters

Characters are the soul of a story. Investigating the outside images of the picture books' characters and identifying their characteristics helps to map out the position of the characters. This research mainly studied how characters were drawn in drawings and how the main character interacts with the other characters.

#### 4.3.1 The Presence of Characters

The researcher discovered that children's understanding of the characters could be divided into 'the outside image of the character' and 'the inner image of the character'. The outside image of the character contains: outside behavior, appearance, and style; the inner image of the character includes: thoughts, feelings, and so on. The main expression of the children's understanding of the characters was as below:

#### 4.3.2 Noticing the Outward Appearance and Inner Feelings of the Characters

The story characters all have obvious outward appearances and are already drawn on the cover pages of this study. Therefore, most of the children could draw the outward appearance and inner feelings in the characters' drawings. For example, when the researcher led the appreciation activity, *The Thrifty Grandma*, children mostly presented the grandma with the following features in their drawings: hair worn in a bun, glasses, stick, and wrinkles on face. When children observed the book, *Der Junge und der Fisch*, children noticed the little boy's orange shirt, green trousers, how he wore a straw hat and carried a fishing rod, and they drew a smile on the little boy's face when he went fishing. When leading the art-making activity, *Diary of a Worm*, children drew an earthworm wearing a red hat and also drew a smiling and confident face. When leading the drawing activity, *Change in One Second*, children drew a clean smiling earth, and a polluted crying earth.

When leading the art-making activity, *The Changing Countryside*, children drew an excavator and described the feeling of the houses through their observations. When children observed the picture book, the most impressive content shared by the children was as follows:

C1: The wooden houses would be very upset; therefore, all of the woods and fields are gone, and the houses would disappear soon.

C5: The wooden houses would cry because they would be destroyed by excavators!

This result was in accordance with Lin (2008) who mentioned that brightly coloured and contrasting characters could help children to clearly recognise the characteristics of every character, which could also enhance the comprehension of the story. Moreover, if the major characters have distinctive features on the cover pages, it can help children to rapidly understand them (Lin, 2013). In addition, children could interpret the story characters' behavior or actions and could also infer their inner feelings from their prior experience or knowledge (Hsiao, 2010).

#### 4.3.3 Noticed Inner Feelings of the Character but Ignored Their Outward Appearance

A few children's drawings only presented the inner feelings of the characters. They ignored the outward appearance of the story characters and chose the style and characteristics they created themselves. For instance, when leading the art-making activity, *Escape from the Mountain*, children drew the panicked faces of the elder and young civet cats; and the happy mood of the humans when they threw away rubbish. When leading the art-making activity, *Petit ours sur la banquise*, children drew happy bears. When leading the art-making activity, *Look after Your Planet*, children drew an angry Lola. Children were influenced by prior experience in this research, and could understand and identify more of the character's delight, anger, sorrow, and happiness. This result was also correlated with Cheng (2003) that readers will always cross-reference the work they are reading according to their personal experience or acceptable ways. Kim (2008) found that a boy borrowed characters from animation and then developed a new story by changing the character's appearance when she conducted a study of how a child chose to draw a story.

#### 4.3.4 Interaction among Characters

According to the research, it was discovered that children describe the interaction among characters as below:

##### 4.3.4.1 Understanding the Interaction among Characters through Prior Experience

When leading the art-making activity, *The Thrifty Grandma*, children mostly drew the interaction between the grandma and the little boy in their drawings (i.e. The grandma requested the little boy take a warm bath with dried orange peel). This may be because some children are often cared for by their grandmothers in Taiwan. Consequently, they were able to understand the interaction among the story characters according to their prior experience.

When the researcher led discussions about their appreciation of the book, *Der Junge und der Fisch*, children presented that the little boy found that the fish was sick and that he took it to see the doctor. This might come from the prior experience that children are usually looked after by their families carefully and would immediately be taken to see a doctor when they were sick.

When leading the art-making activity, *Escape from the Mountain*, children used dots, circles, or spirals to express the rubbish dust produced by humans and also how this dust meant that animals had to escape from the mountain because it was hard to endure the pollution. In real life, children have also suffered the pain from the smoke from burning rice straw near to their school. Accordingly, they could understand the feelings of the animals very well.

When the researcher led a discussion about the appreciation of the book *Change in One Second*, children were aware of the relationship between the earth and humans, and also mentioned the concept of 'polluting the earth' and 'protecting the earth'. The author of the book used exaggerated illustrations to arouse the children's concern about the earth, and the children realised how humans destroy the earth by referring to their own experiences. When children observed the picture book, they made the following comments:

C1: We eat lots of meat, and it is not environmentally friendly. We must use electricity as least we can. This would not cause global warming, and polar bears would have a place to live.

C4: We use lots of plastic bags, and it is not eco-friendly. We should use less.

When leading the appreciation activity, *The Changing Countryside*, although children are unable to use a deeper viewpoint to explore the interaction among the characters, they still mentioned the relationship among the excavator, woods, houses, factories, and countryside. This was because there was a construction site in the neighbourhood when the research was progressing. The excavators were working all day long and the woods and old houses disappeared from the neighbourhood, instilling deep feelings in the children about environmental change.

When leading the art-making activity, *Look after Your Planet*, the researcher also instructed the children to recycle and make classroom trees. The children could understand better the interaction among the characters through their hands-on experience. In this way, most of the children could draw how Charlie taught Lola to recycle and how to love the earth.

The children's understanding of the characters' interaction was mainly taken from their prior experiences in daily life. This result was in accordance with Chen and Hsiao (2014) who indicated that understanding a story is the procedure of an aggressively constructive role, whereby readers use their prior experience and knowledge to understand texts. Moreover, Hsiao (2010) found that children could understand the interactions among characters through prior experience of reading picture books.

#### 4.3.4.2 Understanding the Interaction among Characters through Interesting Picture Books

When leading the appreciation activity, *Petit ours sur la banquise*, all the children mentioned the following interaction: a little seal popped its head out from the ice cave to say 'hello'. It might be because children like animals and they felt interested in a little seal popping its head out from the ice cave in the picture book, so they were impressed.

When leading the art-making activity, *Diary of a Worm*, most children could draw the spider and the earthworm's interaction in their drawings. Through illustrations in the book, the children were impressed and were interested in the image of the earthworm and the spider trying to learn their mutual specialties, and how the spider dropped down after hearing the joke.

Tadashi (2008) stated that interesting picture books can amuse and impress children. Successful character development often encourages children to be interested in the exaggerated characters (Salisbury, 2006). The researcher also discovered that interesting picture books can encourage children towards continuous reading. This result correlated with Lin's (2008) study where interesting picture books include the following features: funny words of wisdom, playful and imaginative illustrations, and where the entire design and arrangement allows children to participate and to feel happiness, imagination, emotional relief, or to interact with other people.

## 5. Conclusion

The research aimed to understand the themes and characters through examining children's story drawings. The conclusion as follows:

### 5.1 Understanding the Themes in Picture Books

After completing a series of activities in which they were asked to read interesting picture books, the children could accurately describe the superficial theme of the stories, but could not offer in-depth interpretations of the themes. Because children who lived in a rural area did not receive any environmental knowledge from their parents or books, most of them were unable to discover the deeper meaning that was hidden in the picture books.

### 5.2 Understanding the Characters in Picture Books

Children could describe the characters' outward appearance and inner feelings in picture books. However, they could not present the inner feelings of the characters in their drawings. Children sometimes created totally new appearances for the picture book characters.

The study showed that when the picture book stories were related to children's prior experiences, most of them could understand the interaction among the characters. Moreover, the more interesting the picture book stories were the more notions of the characters' interactions the children could understand and the more details they could present in their drawings. When children felt the characters' life experiences were similar to their own, or the characters lived in the same environment as they did, they found it easier to understand the interaction among the characters.

## 6. Recommendation

Early childhood educators should frequently attend picture books' workshops and conferences to obtain the new methods of storytelling. Educators and parents also should provide more opportunities for children to appreciate different kinds of picture books in school and at home. Moreover, educators could adopt various strategies to increase children's comprehension of themes and characters, such as matching game, hand game, label me game, puzzle, and so on.

## References

- Chen, C. M., & Hsiao, C. Y. (2014, June). *An investigation of kindergarteners' understanding of picture books through their drawings*. Paper presented at the meeting of the GCIN Conference 2014, Hong Kong.
- Cheng, J. C. (2005). *Children's literature*. Taipei: Psychological Press.
- Cheng, M. H. (2003). How children construct meanings for visual image. *Research in Arts Education*, 5, 1-22.
- Cherney, I. D., Seiwert, C. S., Dickey, T. M., & Flichtbeil, J. D. (2006). Children's drawings: A mirror to their minds. *Educational Psychology*, 26(1), 127-142. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01443410500344167>
- Crawford, P. A., & Hade, D. D. (2000). Inside the picture, outside the frame: Semiotics and the reading of wordless picture books. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 15(1), 66-80.
- Debby, M. Z. (2007). What could you learn from bombaloo? Using picture books to help young students with special needs regulate their emotions. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 39(3), 32-39.
- Doonan, J. (1993). *Looking at pictures in picture books*. Stroud: Thimble Press.
- Evans, J. (1998). *What's in the picture: Responding to illustrations in picture books*. London: Paul Chapman.
- Hirsh-Pasek, K., & Golinkoff, R. M. (2003). *Einstein never used flash cards: How our children really learn-and why they need to play more and memorize less*. New York: Rodale.
- Ho, H. J. (2007, May). *Application of reading comprehension strategies & the encounter problems of new early childhood educators*. Paper presented at the Early Childhood Education Conference of Southern Taiwan, Pingtung.
- Hsiao, C. Y. (2010). Enhancing children's artistic and creative thinking and drawing performance through appreciating picture books activities. *The International Journal of Art & Design Education*, 29(2), 143-152. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1476-8070.2010.01642.x>
- Hsiao, C. Y., & Kuo, T. Y. (2013). Investigating kindergarten parents' selection of after-school art education settings in Taiwan. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 2(4), 208-219. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/jel.v2n4p208>
- Hsiao, C. Y., & Shih, P. Y. (2015). The impact of using picture books with preschool students in Taiwan on the teaching of environmental concepts. *International Education Studies*, 8(3), 14-23. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ies.v8n3p14>
- Hsu, S. H. (2002). *Introduction of children's picture book in Taiwan*. Taipei: National Taiwan Arts Education

Center.

- Huang, H. W., & Hsu, H. C. (2004). A study of creative thinking in the teaching of picture book making: Observation, imagination and reorganisation. *Research in Arts Education*, 8, 29-71.
- Huck, C. S., Hepler, S., Hickman, J., & Kiefer, B. Z. (2006). *Children's literature in the elementary school* (9th ed.). Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.
- Jalongo, M. R. (1988). *Young children and picture books: Literature from infancy to six*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Kindler, A. M. (1995). Significance of adult input in early childhood education artistic development. In C. M. Thompson (Ed.), *The visual arts and early childhood learning* (pp. 10-14). Reston, VA: National Art Education Association.
- Ko, H. W. (2011). *Teach children how to read: Cultivate children's solid reading ability*. Taipei: Commonwealth.
- Lin, M. C. (2008). *A new method for children's reading*. Taipei: Tien-Wei.
- Lin, M. Y. (2006). *Appreciation and application of picture books*. Taipei: Psychological Press.
- Lin, S. H. (2008). Content analysis study of story retelling by children. *Journal of Child Care*, 6, 97-115.
- Lin, W. B. (2013). *Illustrations and picture books*. Taipei: National Open University Press.
- Lin, Z. M. (2008). Recommended fifteen books for children: 0-3. *Parenting*, 2, 230.
- Lowenfeld, V. (1947). *Creative and mental growth* (1th ed.). New York: Macmillan.
- Lowenfeld, V., & Brittain, W. (1987). *Creative and mental growth* (8th ed.). New York: Macmillan.
- Lu, L. (2013). *Art therapy*. Chongqing: Chongqing University Press.
- Millikan, L. (2011). *Image and text*. Retrieved from <http://www.carleton.edu/departments/ENGL/Alice/imageandtext.html>
- National Research Council (NRC). (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children* (C. E. Snow, M. S. Burns, & P. Griffin, Eds.). Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Pankratius, W. J., & Keith, T. M. (1987, March). *Building an organized knowledge base: Concept mapping in secondary school science*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Science Teachers Association, Washington, DC. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 280720).
- Pantaleo, S. (2003a). Godzilla lives in New York: Grade 1 students and the peritextual features of picture books. *Journal of Children's Literature*, 29(2), 66-77.
- Peterson, B. (1991). Selecting books for beginning readers. In D. E. DeFord, C. A. Lyons, & G. S. Pinnell (Eds.), *Bridge to literacy: Learning from reading recovery* (pp. 119-147). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Piaget, J. (1972). Intellectual evolution from adolescence to adult. *Human Development*, 1(15), 1-12.
- Rog, L. J., & Burton, W. (2002). Matching texts and readers: Leveling early reading materials for assessment and instruction. *The Reading Teacher*, 55, 348-356.
- Salisbury, M. (2004). *Illustrating children's books: Creating pictures for publication*. Hauppauge, NY: Barron's Educational Series.
- Sawyer, W. E. (2004). *Growing up with literature* (4th ed.). NY: Thomson/Delmar Learning.
- Sawyer, W. E., & Comer, D. E. (1995). *Growing with literature*. New York: Delmar Publisher.
- Shulevitz, U. (1997). *Writing with Pictures: How to write and illustrate children's books*. New York: Watson-Guptill.
- Stewig, J. W. (1995). *Looking at picture books*. Fort Atkinson, WI: Highsmith.
- Su, Z. M. (1998). The concepts and methods of art appreciation. In 1994 Asia Regional INSEA Congress (Ed.). *Proceedings of 1994 Asia Regional INSEA Congress* (pp. 69-122), Taipei: INSEA.
- Su, Z. M. (2002). Definition and elements of picture books. In S. H. Hsu (Ed.), *The appreciation of children's picture books* (pp. 13-15). Taipei: National Taiwan Arts Education Center.
- Tadashi, M. (2008). *Seeds of happiness: parent-child shared picture book reading activity*. Jinan: Ming-Tian.
- Tsai, S. C. (2011). *Principles in stories for children*. Taipei: Wu-Nan.

- Van den Broek, P., & Kremer, K. E. (2000). The mind in action: What it means to comprehend during reading. In B. M. Taylor, M. F. Graves, & P. van den Broek (Eds.), *Reading for meaning: Fostering comprehension in the middle grades* (pp.1-31). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wang, C. C. (2008). *Teaching reading and sharing story structure*. Taipei: Psychological Press.
- Wilson, M., & Wilson, B. (1977). An iconoclastic view of the imagery sources in the drawings of young people. *Art Education*, 39(1), 4-11.
- Wilson, M., & Wilson, B. (1982). *Teaching children to draw*. NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Wilson, M., Hurwitz, A., & Wilson, B. (1987). *Teaching children to draw*. MA: Davis.
- Yang, C. H., & Cheng, J. C. (2012, June). *The wordless picture books instruction Impact on young children's creative performance*. Paper presented at the Children's Picture Book Conference (pp. 5-24). Pingtung, Taiwan.
- Zeece, P. D. (2000). Books about feeling and feeling about books: Literature choices that support emotional development. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 28(2), 111-115. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1023/A:1009503621744>

### Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>).