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Image credit: Mergler, Agata. "Flowers no 6", wet  
cyanotype contact print and digital rendering.  
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## MAKING AS ENQUIRING: PERFORMING MAKING AS A MEANS OF ANSWERING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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Practice-based research and well-researched creative practice are not the same. The former shapes its question through practice, while the latter refines its answer through research. The paper aims to emphasize the position of the practice-based research method as a strong companion to written methods rather than a replacement. This paper exemplifies the distinctiveness of practice-based participatory research when conducted with culturally specific groups, South Korean in this case, where drawing led to a firm illumination of self-identities where traditional research methods fall short. Through this investigation, the paper aims to contribute to discussions surrounding the diversification of what constitutes knowledge and its implications for research at large.

La recherche basée sur la pratique et la pratique créative bien documentée ne sont pas la même chose. La première façonne sa question à travers la pratique, tandis que la seconde affine sa réponse par la recherche. L'objectif de cet article est de souligner la position de la méthode de recherche basée sur la pratique en tant que solide allié des méthodes écrites, plutôt qu'un substitut.

Cet article illustre la spécificité de la recherche participative basée sur la pratique lorsqu'elle est menée avec des groupes culturellement spécifiques, ici des Sud-Coréens, où le dessin a permis une illumination claire des identités personnelles, là où les méthodes de recherche traditionnelles échouent. À travers cette enquête, l'article vise à contribuer aux discussions sur la diversification de ce qui constitue le savoir et ses implications pour la recherche en général.

## BACKGROUND

Practice-based research is seen as an alternative method of conducting research, and its legitimacy has been debated by scholars and creatives alike. Linda Candy at the Creativity & Cognition Studios describes practice-based research for creative arts as the making of creative artifacts as the primary basis of the contribution to knowledge, along with a body of writing to accompany or supplement the artifact. This research investigates the manifestation, application, observation and analysis of creative production to inform new understanding instead of overlooking the mysteries of the creative process when creating an artifact for investigation (Blumenfeld-Jones). Understanding the process behind creative production is vital for impact in research as the arts allow “producing something new (unknown) within culture (what is established) [...] an indeterminate condition, a threshold between conscious thought and unconscious feeling, an opening onto a liminal space where rationality (theory) and irrationality (experience or emotion) mix in the individual creative act (practice)” (Dallow 49). In other words, creative practices investigate conventional human understanding and offer alternatives in qualitative subjects such as culture and community.

This is not to say that all creative practices are research. Candy acknowledges that every creative practitioner conducts some level of research to inform the work. The key difference, then, is that “practice-based research aims to generate culturally novel apprehensions that are not just novel to the creator or individual observers of an artifact, and it is this that distinguishes the researcher from the practitioner” (Scrivener). Practice-based research is the pursuit of research through practice: it is an evolution of knowledge rather than a growth of individual understanding. The methodologies of traditional written research—of observation, reflection, and theorization—are “not something that is done either before or after work has been made, but [are] crucial to the process of making” (Blauvelt 74-75). “Doing” is not separated from “thinking.” Therefore, research with creative practice—from creative writing to illustrative drawing—falls

under the same scrutiny as traditional forms of research in observation and analysis of the unknown.

There is no reason to consider one particular method of enquiry as less than another. The entire process of creation for the practice-based researcher is in itself research, where the separation of “research” from “practice” does not exist. Therefore, it is redundant for arts research to be called “practice-based,” as if the methodologies, production, or the result of the arts research yields something extraordinary compared to other fields of written research. Then, the separation of practice-based research from “traditional” forms—that is to say, an entirely written thesis—may have been for the benefit not of the art researcher but of fellow academics who do not see the similarity in pursuit of contribution to knowledge with the creative practice. There is an underlying division between knowledge gained from physical labour—the making of the knowledge—and knowledge gained from intellectual labour—the comprehension of knowledge. As Desmond Bell highlights, the hierarchy of the types of knowledge is also prevalent within creative arts research, where the intellectual manifestation of an artifact is of more value than those gained from iterative and persistent making. Julien Posture hints at this distinction when he investigates the reason behind the romanticization of the artist as being free from societal turbulence and economic needs by erasing the work that is required to make art. The distinction, therefore, is another rendition of the hierarchy between the thinkers and the workers, the white collars and the blue collars, rather than the value of the research itself. Creative arts’ process, methodology, analysis, and impact are no different from those of exclusively written output. There is no need for the creative researcher to convince traditional researchers of their worth and significance; the creative arts researcher must be assured that their pursuit is valid without exclusive titling. Practice-based researchers are simply researchers.

This project is particularly interested in the Participatory Arts-Based Research (PABR) method (Nunn; Stickley). It is not research into the practice of creative making itself but its application. Through PABR, new knowledge is produced by the collective efforts of those involved. The method seeks to “empower participants to tailor an in-

tervention to suit their own contexts” (Goodyear-Smith et al. 2). It aims to break down the hierarchy that sits within the research with the researcher, and their hypothesis reigns over the participants who serve the research question. The most significant advantage of PABR in gathering data is its accessibility to specific demographics of participants who are unlikely to participate in traditional forms of data collection such as interviews and questionnaires. Through this method, I sought to pursue research that flattens the hierarchy of the researcher and the researched, the verbal and the visual, and promotes a co-creative environment where the participants are empowered to pave the way in answering research enquiries.

### CHALLENGE

The pilot workshop recruited six participants who identified themselves as South Koreans. The study aimed to collect qualitative data about how South Koreans think about personal identity within their culture. South Korea’s culture has been observed as being socio-centric, which Jungeun Yang calls “we-ness,” where the good of the community and the nation is prioritized over individualism. The study was not to separate individual identity from social identity, as no person’s identity can be articulated away from the social, geographical, and cultural environment that the person embodies (Tajfel). Instead, the participants were recruited to see how people in group-based cultures balance the “me” and the “we,” and how the articulation and potential rebalancing of the two would affect their view of the societal role they embody.

Incorporating drawing was not the first option to implement at the start of this project. However, it quickly became apparent that traditional interviews or verbal-only methods would not be sufficient. Three aspects became apparent with the so-called “traditional” qualitative research methods. First, the recruited participants, who all identified as ethnically and nationally South Korean, refused to call each other by name. Instead, they called each other “sun-seung-nim [선생님],” which translates to “the elder one” or “the wise one.” This is a polite way to address someone without calling attention to their

ages, societal roles, or names. Linguistically, South Korea's grammar is structured differently according to who the speaker is referring to, mainly to distinguish who is socially higher than the speaker. Therefore, referring to each other as "the elder one" is an attempt to flatten the grammatical structure to be polite to anyone. Simultaneously, however, the flattened grammar unintentionally lowers the speaker's position to be "lesser than" the listener. Since calling someone by their first name is seen to be impolite and even intrusive, the participants chose to lower themselves to avoid equality. It was deemed ineffective and even counterproductive to encourage the participants to express their experiences with a grammar structure that lowers the person's social position. Even when talking about their personal experiences, they were abiding by the "normality" of their group—what Benedict Anderson refers to as "imagined communities."

Secondly, partially because of the lack of individualism in South Korea, the participants found it hard to talk about themselves in general. The South Korean language is structured so there is no need to use the pronouns or possessives within their sentences. Thus, using "I" or "my" was unnatural to say. It was the listener's job to "read between the lines" to know whether the speaker was talking about themselves, an object, the listener or a hypothetical scenario. The participants voiced their concern that they sounded self-centred when asked to use "I" in their sentences. The inarticulation of what is spoken of and the merging of tactile to hypothetical could be a byproduct of the indistinction between ethnicity and culture and the "me" from "we" (Watson). In short, the verbal exchange did not foster the appropriate environment for this research about gathering authentic responses from people.

Lastly, the participants were acutely aware of their social positions within the meetings, especially of me as the researcher. Even though I was the youngest one in many of these meetings, the participants sought to know what I was thinking and what I would want to hear. I was seen as the authority figure regardless of my age, lowering their social stance to raise me as someone who was in a socially higher position than them. This was only accentuated by verbal exchanges,

since the language did not allow a neutral social position with these South Koreans. It was apparent that traditional qualitative methods, such as dialogic and verbal data collection, were inappropriate for this study. In these instances, not only do the researcher and participant need to be fluent in their common language, but they also need to come from a cultural background where the language supports such expression of thought.

Other scholars have faced similar challenges when working with communities where verbal communication was not the most appropriate means of gathering data. Mitch Miller co-created a psychogeographic hand-drawn map of a street in Glasgow from the locals and inhabitants of the street. Luise Vormittag collected drawings of communities around Elephant and Castle to archive their stories amidst the area's changing landscape. Yeni Kim co-created drawings of the everyday lives of the women of Jeju Island to preserve its dying heritage. The commonalities among these studies are twofold: first, the studies involved participants whose stories and experiences embody a niche and specific area of culture that is undertreated and in danger of getting lost in history; second, the demographics of the studies were also marginalized within their communities and were underrepresented as people. Minoritization is deeper and more nuanced than the conventional notions of ethnicity, culture, religion, and gender. The participatory direction of these studies allowed the participants to be free of the labels of conventional marginalization and reveal more complex notions of inclusivity and exclusivity among communities. In all these cases, drawing came as an excellent alternative to continuing the dialogue while relying less on verbal exchange (Lierat).

When discussing drawing, I do not mean the outcome of it as an art form but as the action of making marks. Hickman notes that “although it has close associations with art activity, drawing in itself is not necessarily art” (316). What most people considers drawing—the thing that only ingenious or trained persons can accomplish—is perceptual drawing, whereby the drawer has aptly replicated the observed world on paper. Credit for observational drawing is due when the artist removes himself as much as possible for the best repli-



cation. Eileen Adams (2002) suggests two more arenas of drawing: drawing for communication and drawing for manipulation. Communicative drawings are images that follow a specific formula that has been agreed upon among a group of people, and are made to be shared with others. Adams lists charts and diagrams as examples of such practice. Manipulative drawings allow the practitioner to shape and understand abstract concepts and utilize the understanding to express new and innovative solutions to others. These acts of drawing for communication and the pursuit of understanding abstract thoughts, such as self-identity, and their recorded processes hold the same qualities of legitimate and valuable research data as do transcripts from an interview.

I also do not think that visual expression or communication is in any way superior to verbal exchanges. As poems and metaphorical adage suggest, verbal language does not always mean clarity. Instead, this study aims to accentuate the lack of access to drawing and how the lack of visual literacy has obscured its many benefits, so much so that non-specialists deem it too out of their skill sets. For those not adept in visual literacy, drawing could manifest as a form of learning a new language—a translation from words to images. Here, Berger notes that translation is not a bilateral form from one language to another but a triangular trichotomy between two languages and the intention that links the two in between. Learning to draw as a new form of language, therefore, can elicit a revisiting of the intention of the drawer.

## METHOD

**D**espite the benefits of drawing for communication, it was not a natural pursuit for the participants, who all identified as “not artistic.” They expressed concern that their artistic skills were not up to par with my standards, which they assumed to be high since I was a creative arts researcher. Some were worried that their drawings would hinder the study’s outcome. Evidently, they were imagining the observational drawings and the possibility of “wrong” drawings. Rather than verbally explaining why drawing is a

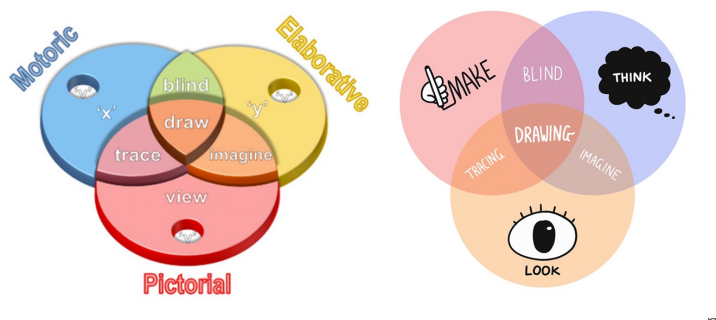


Figure 1: Motoric, Elaborative and Pictorial Formulas in Drawing. Left: diagram derived from Fernandes et al. Right: illustrated diagram inspired by the left. Illustration made by the author, Karen Jiyun Sung.

good option, the best method to convince them of the power of drawing was to encourage them to make drawings for themselves.

Three drawing activities were prepared. The inspiration behind these exercises came from the integrated-components model by Fernandes et al. (305), where he distinguishes three components of drawing and what combinations they yield. I re-drew the chart to share with the participants and help them understand what was expected of them (see fig. 1).

The first exercise is called the Alphabet Game. It was devised by the graphic facilitation company Scriberia. In it, the participants were asked to write an alphabet from their language and develop it into a pictorial symbol. For example, B would develop into a butterfly (see fig. 2). The exercise promoted looking and making/drawing to illuminate the relationship between language and drawing. If the participants could write, they could draw.

Then, the participants were asked to consider a series of prompts. The prompts do not enquire about their identities directly. They were chosen to evoke vivid visual memories (elaborative) of objects or lo-

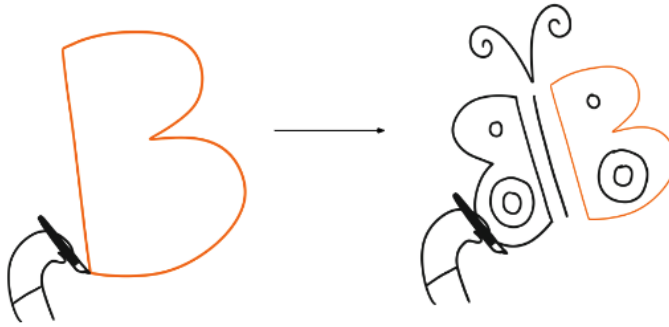


Figure 2: Example drawing of the Alphabet Game. The letter “B” can be drawn into a butterfly. Illustration made by the author, Karen Jiyun Sung.

cations to promote more metaphorical and symbolic thinking behind the definition of self-identities rather than social ranks or positions. They were designed into large worksheets that the participants could physically write and draw on (motoric) instead of presenting as a list of questions. This was to further encourage the participants to consider the workshops as fun activities. The prompts are listed in the illustration below (see fig. 3).

These workshops were done online amidst the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. Although some scholars have voiced their concerns about the lack of intimacy in online interactions (Schiek and Ullrich; Vonderwell), it brought many benefits to this study. Geographical limitations aside, it allowed the participants to join the dialogue from their own homes and bypass any anxiety that arises from entering an unfamiliar place in a face-to-face environment (Mealer and Jones). In addition, the “pseudo-anonymity” (Wilson et al.) created by online interaction—with the freedom to hide their faces—allowed the participants to be more relaxed and worry less about the social expectations of communicating among South Koreans. For these particular participants, it was vital to evoke a dialogue about self-identities

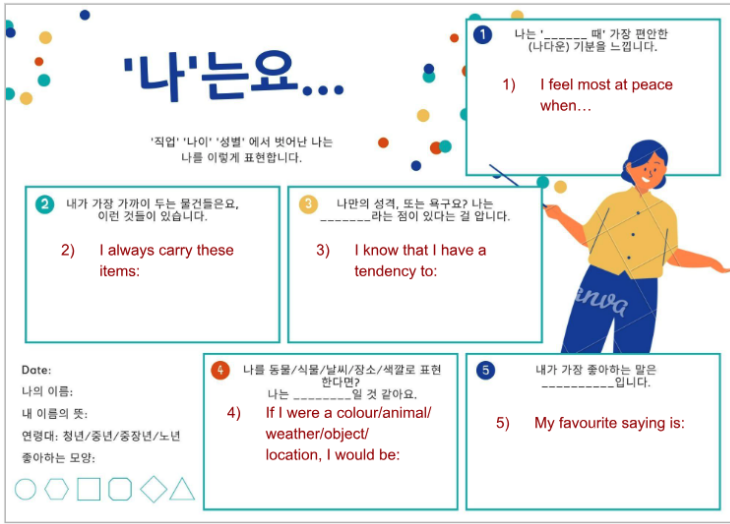


Figure 3: Sample image of the worksheet. Designed by the author. The prompts are scattered around the page for the participants to engage with the whole page. The questions were originally written in Korean, and it is translated into English here.

while refraining from any suggestions that would elicit a question-and-answer format.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The participants later reported that they enjoyed the sessions and shared aspects of themselves that they were never aware of. For example, one participant noted that she was only aware of how important body scent was for her once she shared that she always carried aroma oils with her. Another participant shared that she came to appreciate her passion for writing books that had been neglected in her daily life as a full-time worker and a mother. The participants were eager to combine their drawings into one cohesive symbol that represented their individuality. See the symbols collected in figures 4 and 5 below:

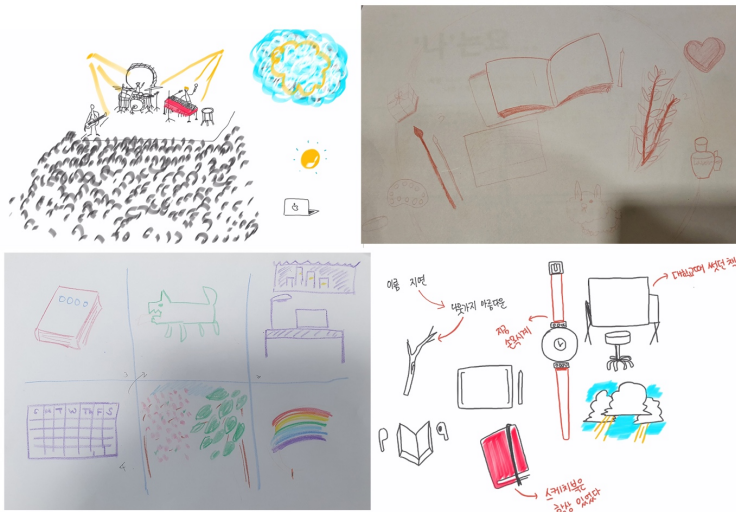


Figure 4: Participants' visual vocabularies during the workshops. Made with various materials, including colored pencils and digital media.

From the participants' responses, it can be observed that drawing and thinking about what to draw gave them new insights into their own sense of self, perhaps a new perspective of their intention during translation as noted by John Berger. Introducing the participants to the process of drawing their stories took considerable steps to ensure that they would not fear the idea of drawing and instead see the "residue of thought and action" (Taylor) that drawing provokes and the reward that follows it.

As the researcher, I entered the dialogue as the "authority figure." It was vital that I facilitated the sessions where the participants were encouraged to share, speak up, and refuse to answer if needed. This tension was quickly resolved when I entered the sessions as a fellow participant who was also ready to share her perspective with the group. I answered and drew pictures for these questions as everyone else would, and shared the personal stories behind the images. We were all under the same scrutiny and vulnerability with each other, "turning the academic from the 'participant observer' to the 'par-

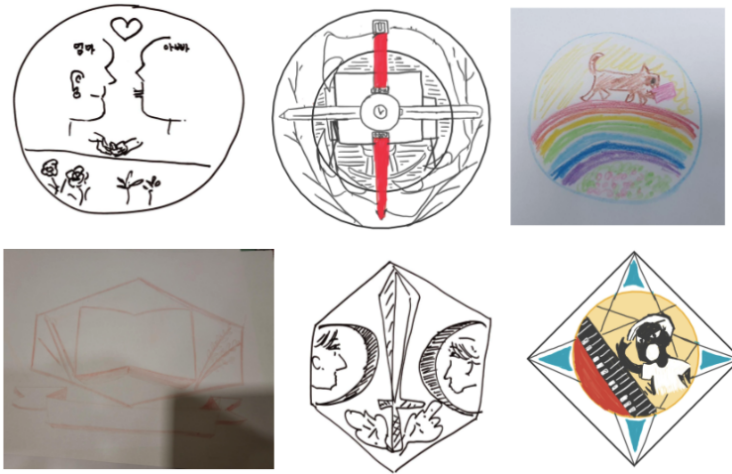


Figure 5: Resulting symbols of selected participants. Made using various media, including digital and coloured pencils.

ticipant observed” (Tedlock). In a participatory setting, all those involved are *participants* regardless of their background, including myself. I was a sharer and not a questioner, and the workshop became a venue for mutual benefit rather than a one-way stream. It was simple to resolve the issue of an authoritative figure: it was not to put myself in a position of authority. The willingness of the researcher to face the vulnerability of sharing intimate stories about myself and treating myself the same as the participants was vital in fostering empathy and trust among the group.

The project presented three challenges for future consideration. First, there was a considerable barrier between the participants and me about the notion of drawing. Although several mini-activities helped to convince the participants that drawing does not always entail detailed observation, it needs to be noted that the participants were informed about the nature of the practice-based study and were ready to be faced with creative activities. If the group were bigger or were unaware of the use of creative methods, the process of using drawing would have been significantly hindered. Drawing for data collection

is still in its infancy and presents plenty of room for development, so more experiences with other demographics or scales of participants would be beneficial.

Second, although drawing promoted deep thinking and expression without reliance on language, it also presented challenges that would not be so visible in verbal communication. Unlike verbal communication, in which all participants would coherently understand words and syntaxes, there was an inconsistency in the usage of visual symbols. For example, a participant had drawn a wolf to express her loneliness, whereas I interpreted wolves as communal animals. Cultural interpretations came into play as well, such as a pine tree to symbolize patience. The facilitator of these drawings would need to be fluent in the use of symbols in their particular participant group. Otherwise, there is a risk of misunderstanding or disagreement with the meaning behind the symbols. These challenges highlight the importance of open communication and non-hierarchical dialogue to clearly establish new conventions with the group.

From the university's ethics committee's point of view, drawing was not seen as a considerable potential harm in qualitative research. The potential of drawing in triggering emotional distress was given the same protocols as verbal qualitative interviews, such as suspending the conversation and avoiding specific keywords. There is no suitable data to measure the potential sensitivity and harm of drawing, and there is certainly very little risk in sharing drawings as it is unlikely for anyone to be able to link a drawing to a specific individual. Simultaneously, however, these drawings were seen as very intimate and honest illustrations of the participants' sense of self. Further enquiry and discussion around the ethical guidance and protocols to support creative arts research would be incredibly beneficial.

Lastly, no participant wanted to take credit for the images they had created. The participants thought that since I created the initial prompts, I would be the main proprietor of the images. I perceived the images as solely the participants' since they drew the prompts as they saw fit to their identities. Franziska Walther notes that the question of authorship in artists is often linked to their social hierarchy,

where being a singular author is somehow more noteworthy than being a co-author within a body. Similar to the solo publication of journal articles as a source of academic legitimacy for junior researchers in academia, being able to produce work that is conceived and formulated by a single person may be perceived as a higher stance for image makers. The participants' refusal to take credit, even as collaborators, may have stemmed from the recurring reminder that they were recruited to partake in my research using a method that I devised. Even though the participatory drawing process was designed to position the researcher and the participants within a "horizontal relationship" (Pereira and Rappaport 56) where every person in the development strives towards creating new knowledge, it is clear that the participants did not feel that they were on a level playing field. For future workshops that may involve a larger group of people, more careful considerations of the participants' contribution and empowerment as collaborators would benefit the pursuit of collaboration. New approaches could include, for example, implementing objects to promote storytelling (Bille) as well as drawing, and allowing the participants to decide how to resolve the research enquiry rather than imposing a predetermined set of methods.

## CONCLUSION

The practice-based research project was a pilot case study to highlight the power of practice and performing activities to arrive at new knowledge. Drawing was introduced as a method to fill in the gaps that traditional qualitative research methods left when interacting with South Korean participants. Due to cultural and linguistic challenges, these participants would not be interested in participating in verbal-only or hierarchical forms of data collection. Drawing afforded more fun and subtle elicitation of sharing personal aspects of themselves that allowed them to discover new perspectives that they did not previously recognize.

Sharing drawings as a democratic communication tool does not hinder the integrity of the artist; in fact, it deepens the respect of the public. Allowing art forms to influence and benefit the public di-



rectly is a great way to demonstrate the importance of creative arts practices within society. Fine art critics sometimes assign virtue to art based on its lack of commercial purpose. Theorist Barthélémy Schwartz posits that artists “would not merit the title of auteur until they were prepared to free themselves from dependency on the marketplace,” and philosopher Theodor Adorno claims that art must “be free from commercial pressures” to “provide a critical perspective on society; its goal should be liberation from the social, economic and political realities” (Davies). However, there is a clear distinction between being free from commercial pressure and being oblivious to societal needs in favor of “self-referential” (Rohr) amusement. Regarding an autonomous person’s work to be more “artistic” than the work that is made from communities serves as another example of independence over interdependence, intellectual over manual, and theoretical over empirical.

This was one example of how the process of drawing can serve research as an alternative, inclusive, and vital tool in gaining a deeper understanding of areas underrepresented by traditional research methods. As the methodology is developed and adapted, it is hoped that there will be less discussion about whether creative practice is a legitimate form of research and more discussion about how impactful it is in creating new knowledge.

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## IMAGE NOTES

Figure 1: Motoric, Elaborative and Pictorial Formulas in Drawing. Left: diagram derived from Fernandes et al. Right: illustrated diagram inspired by the left. Illustration made by the author, Karen Jiyun Sung.

Figure 2: Example drawing of the Alphabet Game. The letter 'B' can be drawn into a butterfly. Illustration made by the author, Karen Jiyun Sung.

Figure 3: Sample image of the worksheet. Designed by the author. The prompts are scattered around the page for the participants to engage with the whole page. The questions were originally written in Korean, and it is translated into English here.

Figure 4: Participants' visual vocabularies during the workshops. Made with various materials, including colored pencils and digital media.

Figure 5: Resulting symbols of selected participants. Made using various media, including digital and coloured pencils.