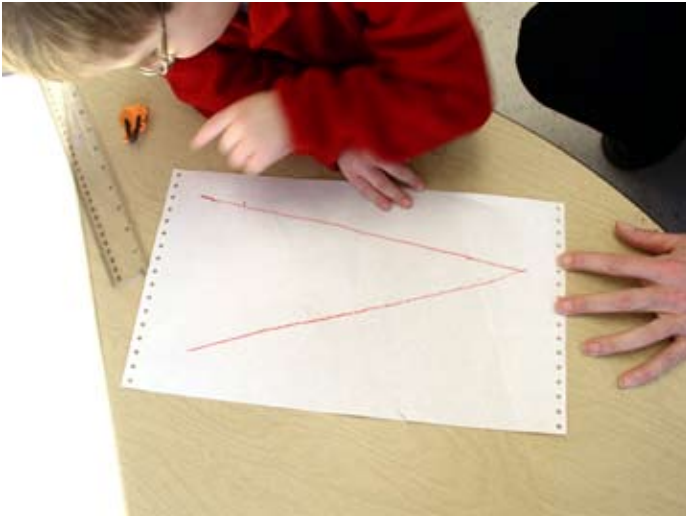


## Drawing a Crescendo

Jason (5.5) arrives with a great sense of purpose. He found the barrette pictured at right just before coming in to the program and recognized in the shape of the clasp, the symbol for a crescendo.



**“I need a ruler.”** Jason draws a “v” shape on its side and explains its meaning to Brenda.



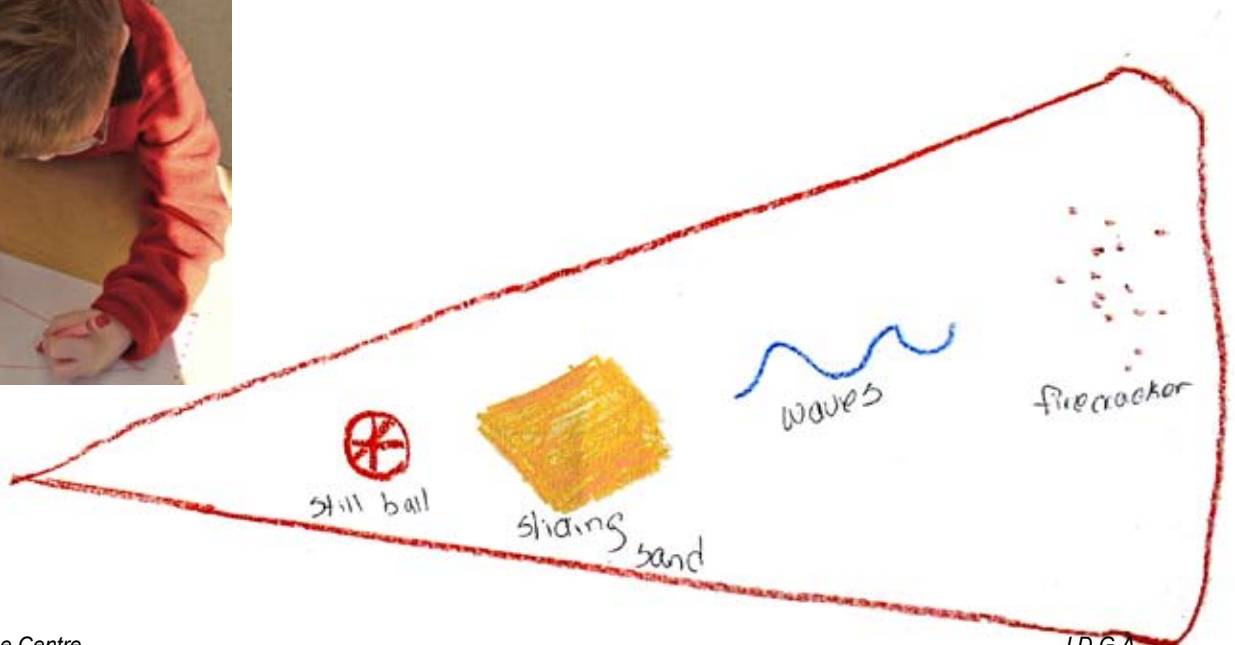
Brenda asks Jason how he might explain the crescendo to “children who aren’t here right now.”

Inside the figure he begins to draw a series of symbols for the increase in volume the figure represents - “A ball that’s not moving”, to indicate silence.

He follows in order with “sliding sand”, “waves” and finally “a firecracker”.



When asked, Jason provides a song by way of example, beginning very quietly and ending with a bang.



## **Drawing a Crescendo – An interpretation of an interpretation**

Jason had recently begun taking music lessons from his mom, who, along with his younger sister, accompanied him on this day in the program. Given that context, it may not be so surprising that he has knowledge of the symbol that sits atop a music staff to indicate gradual increase in volume, although it is interesting that he made this connection in a completely different setting and situation. Brenda had come to know Jason and his family quite well, as they have visited the program frequently over the years. Her response to his statement, “That’s a crescendo” was not one of surprise as much as curiosity. After he had used a ruler to draw the acute angle of a crescendo, she asked him how he would explain what a crescendo is to someone who was not in the room that day.

He rose to this challenge, selecting a different colour of crayon for each subsequent symbol (his mom printed the words you see on the paper later). If we close our eyes and picture the sound associated with each of these, we too can hear the gradual increase in volume. In response to Brenda’s question, Jason represented an auditory phenomenon visually. Brenda may only have expected a verbal explanation. It was Jason’s choice to use the language of drawing. There is elegance in his choice of symbols: they had to be things that he could draw, and that could be understood by others, the latter being the point of his effort.

The word synaesthesia refers to one sense impression being evoked when another is stimulated. Some artists, for example, describe experiencing sound as colour. Arguably, Jason’s interpretation of sound through visual symbols demonstrates a similar ability to cross the border between senses.

This documentation can prompt us to reflect on the kinds of questions we ask children. Do we seek to add complexity, or to simplify and test their ability to regurgitate information most of the time? Does our knowledge of ages and stages create false ceilings that cause us to limit what children might do and hence what we might see, simply because it would not occur to us to offer the invitations? Could we find other ways to invite a translation from one sense to another by suggesting to children that they try to dance a smell, or sing a colour?

As a kind of addendum or coda, after completing the drawing, Jason stood up and sang a crescendo. Then, looking down at his drawing, he picked up the red crayon and added a line that turned the crescendo into a triangle. We don’t know why – perhaps that shape, with its completion, is more familiar. We asked Jason’s mom if she had taught him what a crescendo is through the use of symbols. She shook her head and laughed, and said that Jason’s drawing would give her a good way to explain it if children seemed to struggle with understanding.

In the context of this program, everyone is a teacher, and everyone is a learner.