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# A Qualitative Case Study: Adults as Contributing Factors to Artistic and Aesthetic Development in Early Childhood

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Buffalo State College  
State University of New York  
Department of Art Education

A Master's Project in Art Education

A Qualitative Case Study: Adults as Contributing Factors to  
Artistic and Aesthetic Development in Early Childhood

by

Caitlin M. White

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of  
Master of Science in Education  
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Approved by:

Date:

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Dr. Shirley Hayes

Project Advisor

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### **Abstract**

This qualitative case study investigated the question, “What insights can be gained by examining the role of parents and preschool teachers as contributing factors to artistic and aesthetic development in early childhood?” To build a foundation for this study, my review of literature gave a detailed account of past research that substantiates the benefits of the arts in early childhood development, the role of adults as vital to the enhancement of artistic and aesthetic development in early childhood, and the influence that home and preschool environments have on the artistic and aesthetic development of young children. The participants of this study were the teacher and the parents of preschoolers at a rural New York preschool. Over an eight week period data was collected and analyzed using a constructivist lens centered on Vygotsky’s theories of the more knowledgeable other and the zone of proximal development. Data collection methods included interviews, a questionnaire, and on-site observations. My analysis of data revealed that many adults were apathetic regarding artistic and aesthetic development in early childhood, as well as under-informed of the benefits of the arts in early childhood development. Some adults’ perspectives towards early arts education could be attributed to present changes in technology and culture, along with multiple other explanations that deterred adults from stimulating artistic and aesthetic development. Finally, my research revealed that an increase in knowledge and awareness resulted in increased adult interest to facilitate an early arts education. The overarching theme which correlated all of my findings was the need for education and advocacy on behalf of the arts in early childhood. Further study could examine the actions and perspectives of other preschools or daycare centers in regards to early childhood artistic and aesthetic development.

## Chapter I: Introduction

### Background Narrative

The idea for this study began in a moment of personal reflection as I watched my daughter play along the lakeshore; I began to reflect upon how quickly my precious bundle of innocence had turned into a fearless rock climbing adventurer. This phenomenon is common for parents to witness, yet it must be a very significant period of time within a child's life. Children develop at an amazingly rapid rate within those first magical years, not only physically but also mentally and emotionally. While pondering these extraordinary years, I recalled hearing that these are the most formative years of a child's personality; basically their developmental zenith. Upon further investigation I found that the importance of this stage in life has been grounded in a plethora of research by countless scholars and continually affirmed by experts and scientists. For example, The National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (Brain Development and Early Learning, 2000) found:

The human brain develops more rapidly between birth and age five than during any other subsequent period. Eighty-five percent of the foundation for a child's intellect, personality, and skills is formed by age five. It is a sensitive period when an individual is more receptive to specific types of environmental stimuli, usually because nervous system development is especially sensitive to certain sensory stimuli; this makes the individual more predisposed to learning. (p. 1)

Therefore, research is suggesting that the foundation of who we are is formed by our fifth year. This finding may motivate those bearing the title of parent or educator to place special emphasis on these incredibly formative years of our human existence. Researching further on early brain development, I encountered an article in *Early Childhood Today* which stated:

Psychologists and educators have long recognized the impact of early experiences on a child's intellectual and emotional development. Now, through technological advances, neuroscientists are providing hard evidence that connective pathways in the brain are actually created by repeated early experiences. Scientists are viewing brain activity through neuroscans and other technology revealing that the experiences that fill a child's first five years build neurocircuitry in the brain influencing how a child does in school, in relationships, and in society as a whole. (Logan, 1997, p. 1)

My own daughter is almost four; hence, this favorable span of time is almost over for her. I began to worry about an aspect of her development that I personally care deeply about— her education in the arts. Had I been doing enough to foster my own child's creativity and enrich her experience in the arts? I thought back to the art experiences I have offered her thus far. I questioned how much I had been contributing to her artistic and aesthetic development. While she has proven to be undoubtedly creative and seems to enjoy many various forms of art, I still worried that I had not entirely fulfilled my responsibility to immerse her in the arts. I began to wonder who else felt passionate about this critical window of opportunity we have with young children to develop a solid foundation in the arts. I wondered what experiences other parents are giving to their young children that would enrich their education in the arts. I questioned to what degree not only my child, but all preschool age children are receiving an arts education from their teachers during these especially formative years. Extensive research conducted by The Center on the Developing Child at Harvard (*A Science-Based Framework for Early Childhood Policy*, 2007) concluded:

The period between birth and five years is a time of rapid cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, and motor development. Early development establishes a solid foundation on which higher-level brain functions can develop. Early experiences lay the foundation for

the brain architecture and neurochemistry undergirding such skills. This capacity for development is greatest in early life and decreases over time. (p. 3)

We may assume then, that a child's early engagement in any specific academic area will help create brain connections that have long-term impact. Another researcher, Marie Montessori, famous for her studies in early childhood education, termed these years of early childhood the "absorbent mind" stage. Montessori (1967) described a child's behavior during this sensitive period as being effortless in assimilating the sensorial stimuli of his or her environment and absorbing information from the senses, language, culture, and the development of concepts. She believed that this is a power unique to early childhood, and observed that it fades as the child approaches age six.

As both an art educator and a parent of a pre-school age child, the idea of this very short span of favorable time to offer children a strong foundation in the arts concerned me. With such substantial evidence of "the first five years" being the most crucial period of development, it seems to be an obvious time to engross children in the arts and reap the benefits researchers have proven an arts education yields for both the individual and society's sake.

Scholars placed value on art education as far back as 1891, when G. Stanley Hall's article entitled *The Content of Children's Minds* reported that children think more in pictures and gestures than words. This finding prompted inquiry into studying children's art and became a serious breakthrough for arts education (Hobbs & Rush, 1997, p. 7). People like John Dewey (1917) then began to see connections between creativity and intellect, and began to study its implications and importance. By 1947 influential educator Viktor Lowenfeld promoted art education as a necessary tool for children's self-expression, mental health, and creativity (Hobbs & Rush, 1997, p. 8). Scholars of today continue to agree on the importance of the arts in early childhood education. University of South Australia art education research professor Jeff Meiners

(2005) concluded through his lifelong research that the arts should be an entitlement for all children and is an important contributor to creative action, cultural heritage, and a well-rounded healthy development. Likewise research for the National Endowment for the Arts, *The American Canvas* written by Gary Larson (1997), affirms the growing body of evidence attesting that caretakers who engage children in art activities and aesthetic experiences early in life on a regular basis, are helping to wire children's brains for successful learning.

Reviewing past literature, one may surmise that there are four influential components that make up the most significant influential and contributing factors of artistic and aesthetic development in early childhood: 1) parental, 2) home environment, 3) early childhood educators, and 4) the preschool environment (Kindler, 1995; Koster, 2012; Larson, 1997; Fox & Berry, 2008; Jalongo & Stamp, 1997). Early childhood art educators Mary Renck Jalongo & Laurie Nicholson Stamp (1997) said that most parents do hold some appreciation or familiarity of the arts even if they do not recognize it on a daily basis; however, parents may assume they can do little on their own or at this age in relation to facilitating artistic and aesthetic development. Therefore, I'm supposing that it may not be parent's lack of interest but perhaps other issues which prevent some from offering early arts education. In this research project, I set out to unearth the perspectives, attitudes, and actions of preschool parents and teachers to reveal that which surrounds a young child's earliest arts education.

### **Problem Statement**

Surprisingly, during my two-year Early Childhood Education vocational program in high school, as well as during my university undergraduate degree in Art Education, the importance of art in the first five years of life was only briefly studied, and mainly concerned the benefits of fine motor development. In preparing for this study I found little research focusing on the roles adults play and the contributions that adults make to arts education in early childhood. In their book,

*The Arts in Children's Lives: Aesthetic Education in Early Childhood*, Jalongo and Stamp agreed that, "research exploring conditions for creative and artistic growth in young children is limited, particularly where the role of parents and families in aesthetic development is concerned" (1997, p. 98). Hence, there is a need for clearer understanding into this aspect of young children's development. This gap in the literature provides the main focus of my research which I shall discuss below.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research is to study the adults who are involved in the lives of preschool age children and the formation of their earliest foundation in the arts. My research will further explore these "contributing factors," their multiple perspectives, practices, and intentions. It will also consider the experiences and environments that they provide for young children, which impact their skill, understanding, and appreciation of the arts. Furthermore, I will view this study through a constructivist lens focused on two theories of Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky.

### **Research Questions**

Central Question:

- What insights can be gained by examining the role of parents and preschool teachers as contributing factors of artistic and aesthetic development in early childhood?

Sub Questions:

- What activities, environments, experiences, and routines do these adults provide to facilitate the artistic and aesthetic development of young children?
- What prompts or deters preschool parents and teachers to inculcate an early arts education?
- What attitudes and beliefs do parents and preschool teachers hold regarding the artistic and aesthetic development of preschool age children?

- What contributions can this research make for the field of early childhood art education?

### **Significance of the Study**

Undoubtedly, young children benefit from early learning in all academic areas, which include the benefits of what the arts can teach. Jalongo & Stamp (1997) said that the benefits of an arts education reach far beyond the classroom and in order to say that we have prepared our children for their future the best we can, we must be aware and willing to do all we can to enrich their experiences in art, even at the youngest age. Adults who realize the depth of their role in providing aesthetically rich environments, and understand the impact of quality arts experiences, may support and promote the responsibility of building a quality arts foundation for children prior to kindergarten. Artist and educator Debra Koppman wrote in 2002:

Too often our world is explained rather than experienced. I have the sense that what education in general does, from the earliest age, is to cut off the imagination, either by neglect, because so much emphasis is placed on what are perceived to be more important academic activities, or by the sense that children get that to spend time imagining, or even drawing, is to be engaged in inappropriate activities (p. 138)

Accordingly, art educators are obligated to share the benefits of art education with others, especially the adults who impact young children during those imperative first five years. In the *Journal of Aesthetic Education* article titled, “Can Children Do Aesthetics? A Developmental Account,” acclaimed researcher and professor of art education, Michael J. Parsons (1994) stated:

No one can doubt that the content of our understanding of art as we grow up is dependent on the art that we encounter and the cultural context in which we encounter it; our assumptions about art are directly related to our aesthetic experiences.

Hence, there is a need to create stimulating artistic experiences and empowering aesthetic environments for our preschoolers. Parents, teachers, schools, and communities invest in the

future when they invest in arts education at home and in the classroom (Larson, 1997). Many parents as well as educators can benefit from this research, which delves deeper into understanding the contributing factors of artistic and aesthetic development from the perspectives of parents and teachers.

My research of these outlooks, conditions, and routines may also reveal arts development or the lack thereof within my study sites and help my participants to define or clarify the roles that they play in early childhood arts education. My personal hope is for our future generations to gain a sincere appreciation and knowledge of the arts as well as to benefit from the countless ways in which the arts can teach, express, inspire, heal, and create.

### **Definition of Terms**

Throughout my study, I will be referring to the arts as encompassing the areas of painting, dance, drawing, multi-media, music, sculpture, performance art, theater, poetry, fine arts, graphic arts, photography, calligraphy, film, architecture, and/or any visual or auditory outlet produced out of pure human creativity in any realm and in any original expression of self, mind, body, or spirit. In a post-modern sense, art gives us the ability to question and comprehend our realities. I believe that art is made by humans for many reasons; bound by no medium, no definitive law, and is a means of communicating feelings, thoughts, and even that which cannot be explained.

I will be referring to aesthetic development as the increasing of one's knowledge and appreciation of the arts. Teaching aesthetics at the preschool age level includes: looking at or creating art, talking about what it is they observe or experience, backing up their thoughts or ideas with evidence, listening and considering the views of others, and discussing possible interpretations. Arts experiences provide the opportunities for children to practice aesthetic development.

**Limitations of the Study**

This study is limited by: a) the use of one pre-school for observation, b) the limited amount of time of the study, c) the limited number of participants, and d) the use of one rural community for my study. This study does not deal with the assessment or evaluation of the knowledge or the comprehension of young children's artistic and aesthetic development.

**Conclusion**

Brain development research confirms that early and repeated experiences significantly contribute to the formation of one's intellectual and emotional foundation. Such research indicates that during the "first five years" of life the brain is most receptive; therefore, it is the most beneficial time frame to introduce and expedite new learning. Educational research has continually proven the arts to be beneficial to almost all areas of growth in young children including cognitive/intellectual, gross/fine motor, and social/emotional development. Through observation and thoughtful questioning of early childhood educators and parents of preschool age children, I will investigate the roles adults play as the primary contributing factors of artistic and aesthetic development in this impressionable and enchanted age known as early childhood. In Chapter II, I will provide a review of the literature that supports the foundation for my study.

## **Chapter II: Review of Literature**

### **Introduction**

To build a foundation for this study, I shall give a detailed account of past research supporting how the arts play an important role in early childhood development. I will also discuss research that supports the role of adults as vital in the enhancement of artistic and aesthetic development in early childhood. Lastly, I will describe the influence of home and preschool environments on the artistic and aesthetic development of young children.

### **The Arts Play an Important Role in Early Childhood Development**

In 1826 famous educator Friedrich Froebel recommended that young children should make art and enjoy the art of others (as cited in Fox & Berry, 2008). Fox & Berry (2008) said that Froebel endorsed this idea because he recognized art's importance in encouraging a child's full and complete development and that art helps children develop cognitive, social, emotional, and motor abilities. Froebel (1826) said that anyone can observe a young child creating art, and recognize that art is valuable sensory exploration (as cited in Fox & Berry, 2008). Meiners (2005) said artists explore sensory qualities of the raw materials of their art form, by playing with sound, movement, color, texture, line and shape. Essentially, the arts provide children a variety of styles through which to learn: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. Some examples of kinesthetic art could be dancing, acting, making music, and sculpting. Kinesthetic arts stimulate implicit or hands-on learning. Fox and Berry (2008) maintain that implicit learning is a highly effective method of learning because it instills knowledge through experience, trial and error, and experimentation. Art also exercises young children's control of their muscles and movements, builds coordination and strength, and helps develop eye-hand coordination (Fox & Berry, 2008). Art educator-researcher Joan Koster (2012) said in her book *Growing Artists: Teaching the Arts to Young Children* that well-designed art activities require children to make their own decisions, create an

order, and accomplish a goal, which helps them to learn sequencing and planning (p. 6). She used the example that they must add water with their paintbrush to a cake of watercolor before it can be used to paint. Art activities and experiences also teach how the properties of things change and show examples of cause and effect (Koster, 2012, p. 6). For example, by using their hands to squeeze play-dough they change its shape, and by dancing in spinning circles they realize that they become dizzy. Koster said that viewing art can also help children develop an appreciation of other people and cultures, as well as the confidence to express their own thoughts and feelings through art. Contemporary education scholars undoubtedly agree that the arts can unite students and promote a sense of teamwork, and certainly no one can discredit the fact that the arts play a vital role in developing a child's creativity and imagination. Almost two hundred years of research has continually proven that the arts have a strong relationship and connection to learning.

In *The Arts in Children's Lives: Context, Culture, and Curriculum*, Bresler & Thompson (2002) state that the four art forms typically recognized in pedagogical discussions— dance, music, drama, and visual arts— have unique histories and purposes in preschools throughout the world. Recent research on the development of the brain demonstrates the power of training in music and other art forms to improve spatial reasoning and similar cognitive skills of the very young (Meiners, 2005). In the February 1997 issue of *Neurological Research*, psychologist Frances Rauscher of the University of Wisconsin at Oshkosh and physicist Gordon Shaw of the University of California at Irvine reported that preschoolers who were given piano lessons scored thirty-four percent higher on tests measuring spatial-temporal ability (useful in math, science, and engineering) than did other preschoolers who had not been given piano lessons. Meiners conducted a qualitative research project in 2005, which provided insight into how the arts provide use of spatial, musical, and bodily kinesthetic abilities to foster thinking and encourage learning.

He stated that by using their bodily senses children can explore and directly link aesthetic development with art making. Meiners (2005) also said that the arts are the most natural vehicle for learning because the arts stimulate children's natural tendencies to be curious, imaginative, and creative beings. Children naturally sing, dance, draw, and role-play in an effort to understand the world around them and communicate their thoughts about it (Larson, 1997). Related to role play, educator and researcher George Szekely (1991) suggested that performance art is a powerful way to explore ideas and feelings, giving children the power to take risks and gain a better understanding of themselves and others. Studying art and creating art can have profound and positive ramifications for the student as well as the community in which they will live and grow (Gaudelius & Speirs, 2002). Other scholars such as Koster found that art also provides a foundation for literacy. When young children create art, they are communicating their thoughts and feelings with the skills and knowledge that they have attained thus far in life (Koster, 2012). According to Koster (2012), the arts are a child's first language; children can use the arts to demonstrate their concepts of the world long before they can do so in a spoken or written language. Jalongo & Stamp (1997) also stated that art is a form of literacy, because it is a form of communication. Therefore, in the same way adults must teach children to read and write, so they must teach them aesthetic and artistic literacy (Jalongo & Stamp, 1997). Jalongo & Stamp (1997) indicated that past research finds at least four reasons why the creative arts are important for children, which teachers can share with parents.

- 1) Artistic experiences foster sensory perception, which helps to strengthen and refine visual, aural, and kinesthetic qualities that will serve for lifelong learning.
- 2) The arts provide the opportunity to represent and symbolize childhood experiences, using a system other than letters or numbers.
- 3) Art offers children a chance to experiment, create, and build, which strengthens their

ability to think, choose, and make decisions for themselves.

- 4) The arts expand the world for children, by surpassing logical thought and promoting intuitive understanding. (p. 115)

For these reasons and more, adults can be solidly justified in supporting and providing the artistic and aesthetic experiences of creating and enjoying art with young children. As Froebel (1826) suggested over a century ago, the arts appear to be fundamental to the human experience and to contribute to the overall development of a child. Young children however, must rely upon the adults in their lives for almost every aspect of their growth and development.

### **Adult Significance in Early Artistic and Aesthetic Development**

An abundance of scholarly work recognizes the importance of adults in the enhancement of early learning, yet considerably less research is focused on the importance of adults in the specific area of art education. Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) appears to be one of the first to advocate for guided participation, in which the child is led by an adult to discover their creative potential. Vygotsky stated that children co-construct their theories and knowledge of art through the relationships that they build with other people and the surrounding environment (as cited in Caldwell, 2006). A few decades later, Loris Malaguzzi (1920-1994) pioneered the preschools of Reggio Emilia, Italy. Reggio Emilia preschools use art in endless capacities to facilitate understanding and demonstrate evidence of learning (Hertzog, 2001). These preschools utilize art as a “priceless vehicle for unleashing individuality, stimulating creative thinking, and increasing aesthetic understanding” (Hertzog, 2001). Nancy Hertzog concluded from her 2001 study of the unique early childhood programs of Reggio Emilia that,

Art is the medium by which the educators in Reggio Emilia encourage the children to communicate. Drawing, murals, three-dimensional structures, and various other forms of art fill their preschool environment. Atelieristas (artists) are present in each preschool and

teach the children throughout each day. The focus is not just on art as a final visual product; they focus their attention on what the children are learning and thinking while they are creating. They are making their learning 'visible.' They teach art techniques to give children tools to express their ideas and to share with others what they are thinking, doing, feeling, learning, and experiencing.

This excerpt demonstrates that adults in Reggio Emilia schools play a leading role in giving preschool age children experiences and involvement in the arts. They use the arts to nurture and impart learning in all academic areas. These preschools differ greatly in pedagogy and curriculum from the vast majority of preschools in North America. Koppman (2002) pointed out the significant fact that our ways of parenting, teaching, and understanding of young children are inevitably filtered through a series of personal and cultural lenses that cannot be underestimated. My study will investigate such societal and educational aspects and pressures felt by parents and preschool educators.

As explained in Dewey's *Art as Experience* (1934) children make many discoveries through observation alone, but they are not complete experiences in which optimal learning occurs; the movement of the whole self should be called into play to define an activity as a complete experience. So for example, watching a cartoon may have value in that the child is seeing the end product of an artist, but being encouraged and supplied materials, by a more knowledgeable other, to attempt to draw a cartoon and story plot themselves, would create a more valuable experience (Dewey, 1934). Thus, Dewey, like Vygotsky, seemed to be pointing out that there is the essential need for guidance from a more knowledgeable other in early arts education.

Artistic development in early childhood has captured the interest of many psychologists and many involved in the field of art. Lowenfeld's 1947 child-centered approach called for adults not to impose their own concepts, notions, visions, and ideas onto a child's education in art

(Kindler, 1995). Anna Kindler, author of over one hundred publications and internationally recognized for her research on artistic development and social cognition of art, said that in the 1970's most teachers in North America practiced Lowenfeld's child-centered approach, which left young children to let their art unfold "naturally" without adult intervention or guidance. However, Kindler concluded that most adults who are products of this approach now complain of their lack of insight, understanding, and ability in art. Kindler said that in contrast to Lowenfeld, Vygotsky believed that adult intervention is essential to artistic development. His theory was that, with the appropriate assistance of adults, stimulating a child's potential in a particular domain can promote growth (Kindler, 1995). Kindler made the parallel that infants are led by adults and social interactions to master and acquire language, so by exposing them daily to what we want them to learn, naturally they gain skill in that area of pursuit (1995). She also stated that simply enjoying the innocence of children's art is not challenging them enough. Kindler's position is that we should be stimulating their abilities and helping them to acquire better ability and more skill.

In 2005, Kindler conducted a study where she observed an early childhood daycare center. This daycare was set up with many activity/learning centers at which the children could freely choose to play throughout the day. She observed that the art center was rarely utilized unless an adult was there to encourage, explain the materials, or guide through an art process; only then did the child stay at the center long enough to complete an artwork. Without guidance, children would tend to make a few marks on a piece of paper and then roam to other areas of interest around the room. These observations led her to believe that adult input is essential to young children's artistic explorations. Kindler (1995) said art educators must convince parents and preschool teachers of the significance of aesthetic growth in human development and that the mere availability of material in early childhood classrooms is not a sufficient condition for the enhancement of artistic growth.

Vygotsky's theories support the importance of adults facilitating childhood development. Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development and scaffolding lies in opposition to some people's perception of Lowenfeld's child-centered approach. Vygotsky's theory of scaffolding in early childhood education advocates responsiveness to children's current capacities in ways that move development forward (Berk & Winsler, 1995). Vygotsky also proposed that learning depends on the zone of proximal development, which is defined as the distance between the actual developmental level and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance (Berk & Winsler, 1995). Vygotsky's theories support that adults play a crucial role in the cognitive development of young children. In the following section I shall describe yet another aspect of adult influence regarding early childhood arts education.

### **The Significance of Environment in Early Artistic and Aesthetic Development**

A rich nurturing environment is required to create positive early experiences, which forge the foundations for lifelong learning and behavior and optimize the development of each child (Diamond & Hopson, 1998). Parents play a key role in introducing their children to their culture and to world culture (Larson, 1997). Hence, the home and school environments in which we raise our children absolutely play an influential role in shaping their life. If I think back to my own childhood home, I recall my father's music, my brother's posters, my bedroom wallpaper, and my mother's favorite old movies and musicals. There are endless ways in which the visual and auditory environment that we grow up in influences and shapes our personal, emotional, and intellectual development. Koster (2012) said that art surrounds children constantly and the artistic and aesthetic environment of a child is influenced by adult choices from the colors, textures, and forms of the toys we purchase to the illustrations and stories in the books we choose to read them, the patterns of our flooring, the music we play, the pictures we hang on our walls, all these types of decisions create the environment in which our children live and grow. Parents need to be aware

that they set an example simply with their own viewing and listening habits, their own cultural pursuits, and their own sharing of songs and stories that are a fundamental part of childhood (Larson, 1997, p. 160). Parents introduce their children to media, and hopefully expose them to live performances and exhibitions. Larson (1997) reminds us that for better or for worse, television will provide much of the imagery of today's childhood, and that computers now play an increasingly prominent role as well. He says that parents can share this aspect of the arts, but should also carefully monitor their children's exposure to electronic media. Young children are products of not only their home environment, but their school environment as well.

In 2001, educator Patricia Tarr conducted a study comparing the preschools in North America to that of the preschools in Reggio Emilia, Italy. She observed that the environments of our preschools are generally void of rich, diverse images and artifacts from world and popular culture. Tarr (2001) states that we make clear definitions that home is home, school is school, and nature is part of the outside world; yet children are a part of the world in which we live and need to be a part of all that encompasses rather than be sheltered from their surroundings. Reggio Emilia schools, embrace that latter idea by incorporating the school environment as an important "teacher" to their students. They believe children need a rich, complex environment as opposed to a simplified, structured environment. Tarr described the thoughtful location of Reggio Emilia schools within their community, how they use real "beautiful" objects in their rooms, rather than oversimplified, cartoon like versions, and how they contain mini ateliers or art studios which are adjacent to each classroom. She observed that North American preschools usually isolate particular aspects of our culture and world culture, simplify visual forms, and seek to protect children from the outside world. Preschools in North America do not seem to challenge children to respond deeply to the natural world, their cultural heritage, nor to their inner individual worlds (Tarr, 2001). She stated that art educators must consider the best way to create environments

which support teaching art and aesthetics. As parents and educators, Tarr indicates that one must be aware that the environments we create impact the everyday routines that shape the artistic and aesthetic development of our children, as it shapes their view of our world's cultures.

Parsons (1994) said that children's experiences with art influence what they believe counts as art, what kind of interpretations they make, and even their motivation to think about art at all. Therefore, there is educational purpose to providing aesthetic experiences and consequences to developing one's philosophy of art (Parsons, 1994). He encourages teachers to be creative and find ways to incorporate art in their classrooms and throughout the preschool curriculum. He states that, "The contemporary art teacher should be less concerned with teaching how art is made and more concerned with providing the experiences and inspirations from which art can be made" (Parsons, 1994, p. 4). According to Parsons (1994) early childhood teachers should expose children to reproductions of masterpieces, take field trips that foster aesthetic development and art appreciation, provide art materials and space to create their own art, have their student's art displayed in their classroom, engage children in creative arts experiences daily, and involve families in their art program.

According to Larson (1997) many parents are unsure of their own knowledge of the arts, and do not know how best to proceed in providing their children with a more complete, enriching arts environment. Jalongo & Stamp (1997) commented on the types of environments necessary to foster an "arts-friendly" home environment. Children who live in this type of home have family members who support the arts, are enthusiastic consumers of the arts, and who create opportunities for social interaction with the arts. With such role models present, young children can develop a healthy appreciation for the arts, a better understanding of the arts, and a familiarity with the arts (Jalongo & Stamp, 1997). Their previous research surmises that children must have access to arts materials, time to create art, and encouragement to realize the self-expressive power

of the arts. They suggest that adults offer creative nourishment by giving support, supplying tools, and providing stimulation. Jalongo & Stamp make the parallel that just as in reading literacy the children who have been engaged in prior early arts experiences are more likely to be successful when attempting them in the future. The home is the prime learning environment of young children for literacy, and the same is echoed in research on artistic and aesthetic development (Jalongo & Stamp, 1997, p. 99).

The authors above found that the influence of environment in both the home and the preschool is indispensable to creating a rich foundation in the arts. The American Council for the Arts (2012) found that creative behavior is greatly affected by attitudes, and that families have powerful influence in the forming of these attitudes. Concerning parental influence as a contributing factor of artistic and aesthetic development Jalongo & Stamp said,

Parents who have experienced the arts recognize the value that they have for cognitive development, aesthetic growth, and emotional release; therefore, these parents are more likely to encourage, facilitate, and support these experiences for their offspring. This power is revealed to children only if they have access to materials, time to explore them, and respectful encouragement from adults as they investigate and experiment. (p. 99)

Therefore, the home and school environments in which children grow do influence their development, and must be thoughtfully considered when cultivating the artistic and aesthetic development of young people.

## **Conclusion**

Chapter II provides the reader with the foundational information on which I built my study. I examined how the arts play an important role in early childhood; the arts encourage a child's overall complete development including their cognitive, social, emotional, and motor abilities (Fox & Berry, 2008; Meiners, 2005; Koster, 2012; Larson, 1997; Bresler & Thompson,

2002; Szekely, 1991; Jalongo & Stamp, 1997). I also described research indicating that adults are essential to guiding and giving arts experiences in early childhood (Caldwell, 2006; Hertzog, 2001; Dewey, 1934; Koppman, 2002; Kindler, 1995). Furthermore, I explained the factor of environment on early childhood artistic and aesthetic development (Diamond & Hopson, 1998; Larson, 1997; Koster, 2012; Tarr, 2001; Parsons, 1994; Jalongo & Stamp, 1997). These theorists' ideas form the foundation for my research, through which I hope to make further contributions to the literature on the arts in early childhood. I will investigate the role parents and preschool teachers play in nurturing a child's early education in the arts, the home and preschool environmental conditions that promote the artistic and aesthetic development of young children, as well as the ways that parents and preschool teachers foster such development in the daily routines of preschool age children. In Chapter III I describe the plan for my research.

## **Chapter III: The Design of the Study**

### **Introduction**

The following sections will provide the design of my study, its methodology and theoretical framework, an explanation of my participant and site selection, my role as researcher, the data collection methods I used, and the ethical issues I have addressed. Pseudonyms have been used for all geographical areas, study sites, and participants involved in this study.

### **Background Information**

The background for the basis of my qualitative research case study was prompted by my interest in the studies which have shown the first five years of a child's life to be the most critical in terms of creating intellectual and emotional development through repeated early experiences. Being both a mother of a preschooler and an art educator, I became interested in researching the area of artistic and aesthetic development in early childhood. My own personal inquiry into my child's artistic and aesthetic development led me to question the factors that contribute to such development. Previous research suggests the most influential factors of early arts education is the parent, preschool teacher, and the environments these adults provide (Kindler, 1995; Koster, 2012; Larson, 1997; Fox & Berry, 2008; Jalongo & Stamp, 1997). However, research exploring artistic and aesthetic development in early childhood is limited, particularly where the important role of adults is concerned (Jalongo & Stamp, 1997). Herein lies the gap I intend to address with my research. In my study I intend to interview and question the adults who interact daily with preschool age children and observe the environments that daily influence them. Previous research affirms that adults and the environments which they provide are influential factors that contribute to the artistic and aesthetic development of young children. This past research forms the base of knowledge with which to conduct my own research.

My theoretical framework is the constructivist theory of learning prompted primarily by Vygotsky's theories of the more knowledgeable other and the zone of proximal development. Educator Michael Orey (2010) described constructivism as a learning process that allows a student to experience an environment first-hand, thereby, giving the student reliable, trust-worthy knowledge. Both Dewey and Vygotsky advocated this theory with its emphasis on "created intellectual learning environment and experiences" (Orey, 2010). The student is required to act upon the environment to both acquire and test new knowledge. Those methods are then used to provide exploration, thinking, and reflection. They believed that interaction with the environment is necessary for learning and advocated the learning process of experiential learning through real life experience to construct, comprehend, and apply new knowledge. Vygotsky promoted the required intervention of a mentor, or more knowledgeable other, who must accompany this theory to expedite the process of learning.

The more knowledgeable other (MKO) refers to someone who has a better understanding or a higher ability level than the learner, with respect to a particular task, process, or concept (McLeod, 2010). In regards to my study, I am considering the more knowledgeable other to be the preschool child's parents and preschool teacher. Vygotsky's theories conflict with other developmental theories such as those of Piaget which place emphasis on self-initiated discovery. The zone of proximal development (ZPD) has been defined as the distance between a child's actual developmental level and the level of potential development under adult guidance (McLeod, 2010). These theories of Vygotsky's are significant because they suggest that there is a substantial difference between what a child can achieve independently and what a child can achieve with guidance and encouragement from an adult or more knowledgeable other.

## **Methodology**

This qualitative case study seeks to explore the perspectives, feelings, behaviors, and intentions of the preschool parents and teacher at one preschool site. A case study is defined as a description and analysis of a bounded system (Merriam, 2009, p. 40). Education author Sharan Merriam (2009) said a qualitative case study is an intensive investigation of a specific phenomenon of interest. As Merriam (2009, p. 39) explained, qualitative case studies search for meaning and understanding, use the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, and employ an inductive investigative strategy, which results in richly descriptive research. To further identify my methodology, my research qualifies as an instrumental case study because the case is of secondary interest, it plays a supportive role, and it facilitates our understanding of something else (as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 48). Hence, this study provides a glimpse into understanding just one component of a child's complete art education. Parents and preschool teachers are young children's principal art educators prior to the formal years of K-12 art education. Defining the methodology is an important beginning step because it provides the foundation for my study by narrowing my focus to discovering insights which may help parents and teachers of preschoolers to better understand their roles as facilitators of artistic and aesthetic development. To ensure my study's validity and reliability I will collect and analyze my data through a triangulation of methods including interviewing, observation, and an online questionnaire. In the following section I describe the site of my study.

## Site of Study

Lakeshore Pre-K<sup>1</sup> is a preschool that services the communities situated along the rocky shores of one of the Great Lakes of North America. The school is privately owned, leasing its space in the basement of a local Catholic church. A small magnetic sign on the heavy steel doors of the church basement advertises Lakeshore Pre-K as “A great place to grow!” The sign is the only indicator that a preschool resides within this small street corner cathedral. Inside the door and down a few steps are the comforting smells, sights, and sounds of a busy and important place in the daily routine of many smiling little faces. Here, the owner is the teacher and two mothers serve as teacher’s aides. Lakeshore Pre-K serves as parents only nearby option for a three-year-old to attend preschool; at four years old parents may attempt enrollment for their child into the school district’s Universal Pre-K<sup>2</sup> program. My research sites encompass Lakeshore Pre-K and the homes of the preschoolers who attend this school. I live in this northern New York State community and my daughter attended Lakeshore Pre-K formerly as a three-year-old and currently as a four-year-old.

In contrast to its rural farming character and sleepy snow-blanketed winters, by summer this one stoplight town turns into a bustling place; full of visitors and locals boating, swimming, and fishing by day, dining, drinking, and dancing by night. According to [www.city-data.com](http://www.city-data.com)

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<sup>1</sup> All names and places have been replaced with pseudonyms

<sup>2</sup> Universal Pre-K is an international movement to make access to preschool education available to all families. This allows some or all children, of communities that participate, to get preschool from their school district at no cost.

Lakeshore, New York is classified as a rural community of less than 6,000 people, with 98.93% of its residents reporting as Caucasian. In Lakeshore, 20.7% of the population reported having a child younger than 6 years of age. Its median household income averages \$57,394 and its school district has been continually ranked #1 in its county. The participants of my intimate study were drawn from this community.

### **Participants**

The participants in my study were the parents of Lakeshore Pre-K preschoolers and its teacher. They are members of the community in which I live. Lakeshore Pre-K assumes my role of primary caregiver and influential mentor to my daughter five days a week for a total of 12 ½ hours per week. I explained the basis of my research to the owner and teacher of Lakeshore Pre-K, Lara, and requested access to the parents of her students. Eager to support the field of early childhood development, she warmly agreed to help my endeavors and gave me access to her preschool for the use of my study. After receiving her approval to utilize Lakeshore Pre-K (see Appendix B: Sample Teacher Letter of Consent) I focused on gathering the consent of the preschool parents (see Appendix C: Sample Parental Letter of Consent) requesting their signature and an email to participate in my confidential research. Merriam (2009, p. 105) suggested using a key person who is considered informed and familiar with the area of chosen study to ask for referrals; so Lara helped narrow the focus for me as to whom she felt would be most likely to respond to participating further in a scheduled interview. The consent letter also requested permission for an interview, in their home, to provide me the opportunity to observe the child's daily aesthetic environment. Twenty-four parents consented to participate and all twenty-four responded to the email questionnaire. Thereafter, eleven participants kindly donated their valuable time to being interviewed for my research.

### **Role of Researcher**

In this study I assumed the stance of observer as participant, which according to Merriam gives the researcher broader access to many people and a wide range of information (2009, p.124). An observer as participant interacts close enough to keenly study but does not partake in the actions or endeavors of the participants. The ideal in qualitative research is to get inside the perspective of the participants, yet the level of information revealed to the observer as participant is controlled by the participants being studied (Merriam, 2009, p. 124). For this reason, it is important to prepare well thought out interview questions (see Appendix D: Sample Interview Guide) and to make careful use of probing or follow up questions. Merriam (2009) says observer as participant researchers interact just closely enough with their participants to gain information without becoming fully submerged in the setting and its activities. Since I am a parent of a student at Lakeshore Pre-K, I was careful to not interact too closely in my role as researcher. While examining this facet of the Lakeshore Pre-K curriculum, I was aware of my biases as an art educator. Therefore, my findings will be analyzed using a triangulation of data collection methods to ensure validity.

### **Data Collection Methods**

My methods of data collection ranged from an impersonal questionnaire to intimate interviews. Merriam (2009, p. 104) stressed the importance of the researcher's questions in collecting meaningful interview data. I also observed the home and school environments of preschoolers. This triangulation of observing, interviewing, and questioning was used as a strategy to ensure consistency and dependability in my findings. Merriam (2009, p. 215) explains that triangulation is a strategy employed to increase the internal validity of a qualitative study. By using multiple methods of collecting one's data, a researcher increases the credibility of their

findings by their ability to cross-check its validity (Merriam, 2009). I also audio-taped interview conversations and photographed sites to assist in my data analysis.

I conducted interviews in the participant's homes for the dual purpose of questioning and observing. As well, I conducted the preschool teacher's interview at the preschool. In observing the preschoolers environments I looked for the visual aspects of art in the school and homes, and the preschoolers' access to materials and art space. Observation, when combined with other data collection methods, allows for a holistic view of the phenomenon being investigated (Merriam, 2009, p. 136).

I designed my questionnaire using the Internet research tool Survey-Monkey. I sent participants a brief email that explained the purpose of qualitative research, defined the terms used in my study, and requested completion of the anonymous questionnaire within two weeks. Attached within the email was a link that led them to my questionnaire. In creating my questionnaire on Survey-Monkey, I chose the option to send my link so that responses were returned to me listed only as "web response" with no way to trace which participants responded. I chose this to comfort them with confidentiality, in hopes of having each question answered with greatest sincerity. Prior to beginning my study, potential ethical issues that could occur during the process of my data collection were considered.

### **Ethical Issues**

This study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at Buffalo State College. I also completed the CITI Program review of ethics for research using human participants in social and behavioral studies. Upon entering into each of the participant's homes, as well as the preschool, I communicated to all participants the purpose of qualitative research and the ethics involved in conducting my study. While conducting my research I kept in mind that the main concern in qualitative research is to "gain understanding into the area of interest

from the participants' perspectives" (Merriam, 2009). Although I believed my participants to be at minimal risk for any type of emotional trauma, I still reassured them that my research was in no way judgmental, but rather it was intended solely to gain insights into their feelings and behaviors about their preschooler's education in the arts. I made every effort to conduct my study in an ethical manner to contribute knowledge to the field that is entirely trustworthy (Merriam, 2009). All participants' information was kept strictly confidential and pseudonyms replaced all names.

### **Data Management and Data Analysis**

My data was organized into two main categories: 1) home influence and 2) preschool influence. Each category was further divided into a folder dedicated to my interviews and observations and a folder dedicated to my questionnaire materials. All data including photographs and audiotapes will be stored in my home for up to 3 years, as per federal regulations (Merriam, 2009). My data analysis found common patterns in adults that were influential to a young child's artistic and aesthetic development. After each interview I converted my hand-written notes of responses and observations, as well as the audio recordings of each interview, into computer logs on each participant. I then used the computer to code each participant log. When my interviews commenced, I transferred all of the codes and questionnaire results to index cards and arranged and grouped them according to similarities. The insights found from my data analysis are cataloged in the forthcoming chapter.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter reviewed the design of my study. The background information provided was necessary to understand that my study rests upon past research, which points to adults, and the environments which they provide as being the most influential factors that contribute to the artistic and aesthetic development of young children. The methodology of my research was

defined as a qualitative case study which seeks to gain insight into a child's earliest education in the arts. I described the site of my study as a private preschool and participants homes in a rural community along one of the Great Lakes in northern New York State and discussed my participant selection. My research stance is declared as that of an observer as participant with a triangulation of interviews, a questionnaire, and observation used for data collection. The integrity of my study has been qualified by the Institutional Review Board at Buffalo State College. I certify that participants' information has been kept strictly confidential and pseudonyms have replaced all names. Lastly, I explained how my data was organized and my analysis strategies for analyzing the data. Chapter IV discusses findings from the research I have conducted.

## **Chapter IV: Findings**

### **Introduction**

Since early childhood is beheld as a finite window of time for advancing development, I chose to examine the people responsible for providing an education in the arts for the very young. Intent on discovering what parents and preschool teachers are doing with young children in regards to all aspects of the arts, I questioned 24 parents of preschool children and chose to focus on eleven for in-depth interviews and observation. My investigation led me to the following findings.

### **Apathy in Adults towards Early Childhood Art Education**

The triangulation of data collected for this study suggested a casual, if not indifferent attitude from most adults regarding artistic and aesthetic development in a child's first years of life.

I sat at an old oak kitchen table, an exhausted looking dog lay a few feet away, glimpsing up at me every so often without raising his head. Jack seemed slightly uncomfortable. He shrugged his shoulders, "I think most of the time when we (society as a whole) do art with our kids its more to occupy their time (hesitant pause) than to teach?" Jack's honest response suggested the foremost unforeseen finding that stood out from my data collection analysis, which was that most parent participants in this study were rather apathetic about their preschool child's arts education. With the exception of two mothers and one married couple, the majority of my participants disclosed that they have not given thought to the environments or experiences that facilitate their child's artistic and aesthetic development. These parents did help their children initiate and execute some arts and aesthetic activities, but rarely with the intention of educating during these experiences. During the course of my interviews, I noticed that the majority of my participants did not perceive teaching about the arts as part of their role as parents. Parents in this

study were considered the more knowledgeable other, yet my research did not uncover any efforts being made to advance their child's development in the arts by practicing constructivist theories such as Vygotsky's. Most of the parents I interviewed had the materials and space available for practicing the arts, but their children were limited as to what they could accomplish without adult guidance. Many of the parents simply did not see it as a priority to utilize their adult time to instruct or guide while their children create art. One parent Larissa told me that she would be willing to pay for lessons in the arts if her preschooler expressed interest. She followed by saying, "But she hasn't yet, so I am just too selfish to do it." She even admitted her daughter has an art easel (given to her as a gift) but that she has not put it together yet because she doesn't want to have to "deal with it." This parental attitude of triviality and indifference towards the arts surfaced throughout my interviews.

Most of the aesthetic experiences that these adults have been giving to preschoolers are given at face value and purely for the child's entertainment, not for the numerous benefits noted in Chapter II of this document. Such parents admitted to seeing the arts as a way to consume their child's time as play and not for the benefits of any serious learning. These parents focused on creating art as an activity to consume their child's leisure time. One parent acknowledged, "Honestly, I just think of art at this age as something that's easy to do to occupy her at home." Parents also considered children constructing store-bought crafts as an art activity. This is an issue that many in the field of art education would debate. My bias is that, ready-to-make crafts, while having some benefit of an art experience, produces a similar result for each creator, which lacks the original thought and expression to be considered an art product. Art educator Kathryn Gaspar (1995, p. 47) made a similar statement, "When art materials are used to copy with few or no personal choices then it is not art." Gaspar argued that commercialized crafts require time and patience, but little skill. Thus, she requested parents and early childhood educators to think about

art experiences instead of art projects to put the emphasis on the children's process, instead of the thing to be made.

It also became clear to me that many participants saw the arts as merely a normal part of early childhood. For example Beth said of her daughter, "I think that the experiences she has with the arts are just typical things that are part of being her age." She continued, "I think that preschool is the place she gets the most arts and creative play time, being able to play dress-up and 'build things' with others." Certainly young children integrate the arts as a part of their playtime, but based on Vygotsky's theory, children need that more knowledgeable other to take from the level of known development to the next level of potential learning development. Szekely (1995) wrote:

So much of a child's art is tied to play that parents often do not see art as a creative performance needing support. Parents assume that art, like play, is self-inspired and self-nourished, so that neither receives great attention. Support for art in the home requires that parents clearly express how they feel about art. Parental support of the child's creative words, gestures, and play with art builds enthusiasm and an appetite for greater artistic challenges. (p.16)

During the course of my research I found that Vygotsky's MKO achieving the ZPD did not occur on a regular basis in either the home or the preschool environment. Again, Vygotsky believed that learners respond to their degree of external stimuli. As a result, he distinguished between those two developmental levels (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 85): the level of actual development is the level of development that the learner has already reached, and is the level at which the learner is capable of independently. The level of potential development (ZPD) being the level of development that the learner is capable of reaching under the guidance of a teacher or peer (MKO). At this level the learner is capable of solving problems and understanding material that they are not capable of solving or understanding at their level of actual development. The level of

potential development is the level at which learning takes place. It can only occur under the guidance of or in collaboration with others who are more knowledgeable. My research did not find these adults to be taking further steps necessary to reach these young children in this area to instruct them at their level of potential development. For example, I observed that all of the preschooler's self-portraits on display in the preschool contained similar characteristics: straight lines to represent hair, two circle eyes, a dot or a circle nose, a U-shaped mouth, no neck, and an oval body with stick arms and legs. Clearly time and instruction in art is needed to teach these children that there are different ways to use line to represent differences in hair, our eyes are not merely circles, but rather almond-shaped, our noses look nothing like a circle or a dot, our faces have unique ranges of expressions, our heads are attached to our bodies by our neck, and certainly our bodies are not mere ovals with stick-like appendages. Educator Kathryn Gaspar (1995, p.45) reminds, "As facilitator the teacher looks for the next step in the process in which children are engaged and guides them into new areas." Provided that the more knowledgeable other here had facilitated this type of aesthetic viewing experience and a bit of artistic guidance, this art activity would have been taken from the level of actual development to the level of potential development (ZPD), suggesting the important role of art teachers in young childrens' development.

All of the parents questioned online replied that they were at least 'somewhat' interested in the arts. Over half of these parents reported that they 'often' engage their preschooler in conversations that facilitate learning about the arts (see Appendix E: Questionnaire Results). Nevertheless, my interviews did not find the arts as being part of any routine dialogue within most homes. Furthermore, I found very little original artwork by professional artists in most homes and the majority of these homes also lacked real musical instruments. This latter observation often led me to inquire of parents whether they were concerned that so many people in recent decades do not know how to read music or play a musical instrument. One parent Jenna

laughed and said, “Even the most famous pop stars today don’t know how to read music or play instruments! Half of them can’t even sing! Everything is computerized!” More than once I found a general lack of concern about the arts for future generations due to computer technology being able to produce such amazing visual and auditory feats.

Parents did not initiate any dialogue with me regarding the advantages of early arts experiences, which made them appear to be unaware or under-informed of its benefits. Furthermore, every parent I spoke with admittedly ranked art as an area of less academic significance, which explained why these parents may not place great emphasis on an early arts education. None of the parents interviewed mentioned the arts in regards to benefits such as: intellectual and emotional development, cognitive, social, or motor abilities, developing an understanding and appreciation of other people and cultures, or as a way to communicate and express feelings and ideas. Surprisingly, not one parent interviewed offered any dialogue on their concerns or perceptions of their child’s artistic abilities.

One easily missed opportunity I uncovered is that all of the parents I interviewed said that they display their children’s artwork, yet only two mothers said that they talk to their children about their artwork on a regular basis. The others had responded that they “never thought to” or “rarely” did. Talking to young children about their creative work is beneficial for the child’s aesthetic development and can benefit the parents as well to see the world from their child’s eyes. Kindler (1995) reminds her readers that the verbal interchange between a child and teacher is an important means of enriching and expanding artistic learning.

While I can attest that these preschoolers have access to many arts activities, my research found little potential for aesthetic growth produced from consistent repeated aesthetic experiences with a more knowledgeable other. I continually probed parents for examples of aesthetic discourse with their preschooler. Only one parent could offer a moment to share with me. He told

me that he remembered his daughter had asked him about a painting in their kitchen of a man dressed as a clown holding a chicken in one hand and a wine bottle in another hand. He explained to her that someone had painted it and had to “think of that idea to paint it.” These were the stories I was looking for but did not find. Understanding of art occurs through having many art experiences, and deepens and evolves over time (Gaspar, 1995). These are the types of small, yet important ways we can teach preschoolers. The more I do with my own daughter, the more I am confirmed of her aesthetic development. She is constantly pointing things out to me that I have taught her, “Look Mom...graffiti art! Remember sometimes artists get paid to do it but sometimes they get in trouble?” Just yesterday she said, “Mom you sit there (pointing to the chair closest to an abstract painting near our table in a restaurant) because it’s by the art just how you like with no real stuff in it!” Young children learn from our conversations about art even if they have their own unique way of expressing a concept. When an adult pays attention, daily life provides us with endless opportunities to talk to and teach children about the arts.

The parent participants who were novice artists and musicians surprised me the most. They all admitted receiving great joy from their art and truly appreciate their ability, yet none were providing much, if any, instruction to their child in their field of knowledge. They all gave credit to their parents or families’ influences for these gifts, but now are not giving the same to their children. Kara took piano lessons from age three through high school, but has “no drive to push” her children to do the same because she “despised” being put on the spot to play in front of people as a child. She said it made her want to “curl up in a ball and die.” Though she wished now that she had a piano in her home and had continued to play through college. I asked if she will invest in lessons when her children are older to which she responded, “Only if they are interested and ask to do so.” Another parent was a ‘Fine Arts’ major in college, so I inquired whether he takes time to teach his daughter since I assumed he must be proficient in many art

materials and processes. He shrugged and said, “Not really...I guess I should make it more serious. I guess I should open her mind to what you can do with art.” Though several parents held noted experience in a specific genre of the arts, they were not making it a priority to impart that same knowledge to their children.

Consequently, the majority of these parents had not seriously invested their time, money, or efforts into early childhood artistic and aesthetic development. Most participants put forth little to no effort on behalf of aesthetic learning or artistic instruction. These insights contributed to this study finding a general attitude of nonchalance in adults regarding early artistic and aesthetic development. This information initiates my next discussion that includes the changing values and views of modern parents and the ways that the twenty-first century has impacted early childhood arts development.

### **Twenty-First Century Implications**

During data analysis, it became evident that the present culture and technology of our society has impacted the arts in a variety of ways. Most parents implied that they thought of the arts as an extra-curricular rather than academic activity. Even with this as the general perspective, none of the parent participants I interviewed paid for music, art, or acting lessons for their preschooler as they did for example, soccer and gymnastics. Two parents did pay for their daughters to take dance lessons. Still, 87 percent of those anonymously questioned online reported that their preschooler had attended some type of live theater or a performance. These findings concerned me as one parent Dean discussed the impact of film and music in our society. I presented a question to him, “Our society today seems to be gluttonous consumers of the arts as entertainment, yet are we producing enough artists, musicians, dancers, sculptors, designers, painters, singers, and so on to fulfill this ever increasing ‘demand’ to be entertained?” Dean said, “I’m not sure who is responsible for creating artists...it’s the classic question of whether an artist

is born with a God-given talent or whether they have become talented through inspiration and dedication to their craft.” His wife Kara keenly noted that the television show *Glee* has really “glorified the arts” for a lot of younger kids and might inspire careers in the arts. She added that Nickelodeon’s popular show *Victorious* is about a group of kids at a performing arts high school. We discussed that there are also several Disney Channel shows based on teenagers involved in the arts. In recent years, reality shows like *American Idol* and *Dancing with the Stars* have also been encouraging to youth and adults. Kara mentioned *The Fresh Beat Band*, a show targeted towards preschoolers, “...they play their own instruments, sing, and dance.” Kara mentioned the need for more of these shows, “...since unfortunately we have to admit that television has replaced a lot of the teaching nowadays.” Later she shared, “We used to sit and watch my mother play the piano and sing, and my father even taught me (to dance) the ‘box step’...my children probably won’t have either of those experiences.”

Arts involvement can be free or very inexpensive; however I found socio-economic status did provide the ability for some children to have more expensive experiences with the arts outside their home. However, those experiences lacked the proper dialogue with a more knowledgeable other to be considered complete artistic or aesthetic learning experiences. For example, Jenna and Jason’s children have experienced the extraordinary live performance art of *Cirque du Soleil*. Inquiring further into the experience, I asked if there had been discussion before, during, or after this extraordinary event. “Well tickets were over a hundred dollars apiece. I dunno...um, I just saw it as family entertainment. I guess we just talked about it like we would have after a movie (brief pause) like just saying how we loved it and how good it was. I mean... the girls definitely enjoyed it.” *Cirque du Soleil* events provide endless opportunities to teach about the arts and facilitate dynamic and productive aesthetic discussion with a preschool age child. Kindler (1995) said that what matters most is not just the presence of the artistic and aesthetic experiences, but

rather the quality of the external input. Like Jenna, I heard several other participants who used the arts as a means of their family making memories together, to continue holiday traditions such as attending The Nutcracker ballet, and to provide special entertainment when the event presented itself. Larissa was another example of a parent that had the financial ability to provide more exclusive arts and aesthetic experiences. Yet, Larissa said frankly, “Oh, I definitely rely on the pre-school teacher to expose them and do more arts stuff with them!” She said that reasons like that are exactly why she and her husband are willing to pay for private schools throughout their children’s education, so that they “don’t have to do all that extra stuff.” Larissa said, “Besides, in my mind, the arts are more of a luxury, not a necessity.” Her children had both been to Disney World several times before age five. I told her that nearly everything about Disney presents an opportunity for a preschool level aesthetic experience. The arts abound there in every street and on every ride in every form including: dancing, singing, acting, performances, and visual arts. Larissa appreciated the entertainment value of it all, yet dismissed what goes into creating the final product. Opportunities for aesthetic development like this are plentiful, but parents like Larissa are not taking full advantage of them.

Another intriguing finding presented itself towards the end of my research; smart device<sup>3</sup> apps have become a major part of preschooler’s lives. Modern parents are giving young children access to iPads, iPods, and iPhones which contain endless learning opportunities. Of course it is up to each parent to decide whether to choose apps that teach or apps that mindlessly entertain.

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<sup>3</sup> A smart device is a device that is digital, active, computer networked, is user reconfigurable and that can operate to some extent autonomously.

Parents now have the ability to make choices that will foster artistic development on the go and at home due to the vast array of art apps available. One of my parents, Jenna, thought that this was not really making art, but her husband Jason did. This is an issue up for debate, regardless, these apps are teaching children to make choices, engage in a creative process, and use their imagination to create an original piece of work. For example, in one simple yet incredible app for preschoolers, a child chooses from a wide array of artist's tools (paintbrush, marker, pencil, spray-can, charcoal, crayon, etc.) and colors to create their one-of-a-kind masterpiece on their blank "canvas" of a screen. It can then be saved to the device or emailed to a recipient for sharing or preservation. It is a convenient way to simulate an actual process, at times when they otherwise may not have had the ability to partake in an arts activity. Another app "plays" a song of their choice on the piano by touching the keys as they light up- which preschoolers find intriguing. For many, this may be the only "piano" that they have ever played. One mother said, "Oh yes, Violet already says she is going to be a fashion designer (because of an app)...but I don't know how to sew so I don't know who's gonna teach her that! [laughs]"

Many parents felt that the demands or priorities of our society today make it difficult to focus on artistic and aesthetic development. One busy mother of four, Faith, sipped her hot tea while reflecting with a sigh:

Leisure time in our generation was so different from the leisure time of this generation. There is less leisure time and so much of that time can be consumed with technology. They have instant access to any program with inventions like DVR and On Demand! When we were kids we had to wait for the show we wanted to watch once a week or once a day, now they can watch every episode of every show they've ever liked! It's more challenging to set the priority to sitting and making art, practicing an instrument, or even making up a dance or a skit. Those are things I remember doing all the time growing up!

Again, Koppman (2002) pointed out the significant fact that our ways of parenting, teaching, and understanding of young children are inevitably filtered through a series of personal and cultural lenses that cannot be underestimated.

Faith began to tell me about her family who had influenced her in areas of the arts. She shared with me that while growing up her father would write and read them poetry. Currently, she writes for her profession at a nearby university and is also an avid writer at home. Szekely (1995, p. 16) wrote that when artistic people reminisce, they are the first to recall the important individuals at home and in the schools who helped them formulate crucial attitudes and respect for their work. Faith conveyed that her mother's extraordinary and bold sense of style influenced her love of fashion. She also said collecting sea-glass as a child with her family, "...taught me about the value of beauty." Similarly, Szekely (1995) acknowledged:

Home art teaching requires finding opportunities in everyday tasks to plan, select, and develop a sense for the visual in everyday events. It involves seeking moments of visual pleasure, such as looking up to discuss a special cloud or examining an old doorway during a walk. There needs to be a sense of importance to living with and being surrounded by beautiful things and discovering or collecting interesting objects. Children often find objects of visual interest such as a pine cone on a daily walk or a shiny rock to fill their pocket; parents need to support such searching and provide a spirit which inspires artistic values. (p.17)

From the rest of our conversation and my observations of her home, it was evident that Faith not only values the arts but does her best to promote artistic and aesthetic development in her children. She uses her love and knowledge of nature to nurture art appreciation and foster aesthetic discourse with her children. Her home is full of eclectic furnishings, antique objects,

children's artwork, photographs, poetry painted on walls, and imaginative uses of old barn wood.

Accordingly, Gaspar (1995) said:

Learning also takes place on a subconscious level. Children relate to adults as models. By making art with them or bringing works of art to the classroom, sharing what we see in nature, or talking about how a picture makes us feel, we teach children that it is meaningful to look, respond, and create. (p. 45)

Faith said that her toughest challenge fostering artistic and aesthetic development as a parent is the battle against mindless technology and her boys' "365 days" of sports obligations.

In summary, most parents are assisting preschoolers to be creators and consumers of the arts, albeit mainly for its face value/entertainment purposes. The technology of our era has changed perspectives, priorities, and influences within our society's culture. For instance, none of the sites I visited had a piano, but at every single site preschoolers had access to (if not their own) smart device. My next section will provide some of the many other reasons for the lack of artistic and aesthetic development occurring at the preschool level.

### **Autant De Raisons (So Many Reasons)**

My study uncovered many reasons why adults are not prompting artistic and aesthetic progress, or growth, in early childhood. There are several factors which seem to deter preschool parents and teachers to inculcate an early arts education.

Adults and the environments they provide are the contributing factors in this area of early childhood development, yet over half of my participants had never considered it being their role. Consequentially, they are not attempting to foster such development. The majority of parents instantly agreed that they rely on the preschool for this aspect of their child's education. I shared this information with Lara, the preschool teacher, and she nodded, "Um, yeah, I think most of my parents see preschool as their kid's creative outlet." She said that she has realized this over the

years. “I see a lot of kids that aren’t allowed to use scissors at home, so we are their first experience with scissors; they have to learn to cut here.” I told her that in one of my interviews the mother said she relied on Lara because she felt art was “too messy” to do in their home. Lara responded,

“Yeah, see... I like messy, because I think that’s the only way you learn! For example, if they don’t rinse their paintbrush in between colors they learn that it gets to be a muddy brown...and they have to have that glue experiment...they have to see that if they squeeze out too much that it’s not going to work! If they have to have that experience here, that’s fine... that’s how they learn. I can’t do it for them just because it’s neater, because then they won’t learn.”

Another deterrent seemed to be parents questioning age ability. When I asked Elise if her eldest, who just turned five, had been to an art museum, she looked puzzled and replied, “Is she old enough for that museum yet?” Similarly, when I complimented Jack about his knowledge of art and obvious talent, I asked him very nicely why he didn’t feel he could teach more to his three year old child. He said, “I just doubt that there is much she could really understand it at this point.” Most children are masters at the ability to verbally communicate by the beginning of the preschool years at age three. This makes them capable of participating in even the simplest form of aesthetic development by describing their feelings and thoughts in response to a work of art. However, most need prompting from, you guessed it, a more knowledgeable other. In another example, Kara and Dean’s home had more art on the walls than any of the homes that I visited. When I asked, “Have you talked to them about any of this art?” Kara replied, “No...nope, I think they are pretty blind at this age as to what goes on (visually) around our house.” Her assumption here suggests that adults must wait until a child questions an adult about their aesthetic

environment. By not “raising the bar” or practicing Vygotsky’s theories, her children may remain unchallenged to learn about the art in their daily life.

Another reason for the indifference I uncovered, towards fostering early artistic and aesthetic development, was that most parents valued other areas of development more than the arts. For instance, Jenna was very athletic in high school and told me in no uncertain terms that she is more concerned with her children excelling in sports. In the summer she pays for soccer and t-ball and during the winter weekly skiing lessons. Her girls are already excellent swimmers, spending the majority of their time in the summer in their resort-style pool. Jenna shrugged her shoulders and said, “Sports is what I know and sports is what’s available.” She said she feels that sports are more important to her personally than the arts, so that is naturally what she is going to push her kids towards. She also mentioned how sports are group activities vs. isolated activities like voice, piano, or painting lessons. For this reason she feels they teach important lessons that the latter could not. She said about her four children, “If they show interest, when they ask, when the school offers... then they can do all that stuff (art, music, plays, etc.).” Furthermore, every parent I spoke with admittedly ranked art as an area of less academic significance, which explained why these parents may not place great emphasis on an early arts education. Conversely, Gaspar (1995, p. 48) said that art is needed for humanity to grow in a balanced way. She wrote that engaging in art experiences nourishes a vital part of our being that does not get nourished in other intellectual activities or physical activities.

Besides being involved in many other activities, like team sports, parents responded in the online questionnaire that they felt they lacked the knowledge or skills necessary to educate their child in this area. During my interviews, I heard several stories which correlated negative K-12 experiences with this finding. One father, Jason, told me that he values and appreciates the arts, but was always frustrated that he was never very good at art in school. He declared, “I would

never be able to teach my kids how to draw since I could never draw well myself!” Another parent, Beth, shared similar discouragement in her art abilities. Hers was due to two childhood memories in art class. I could sense a deep juvenile hurt had never left her when she recalled these stories. It was elementary school (she was unsure of the exact year) and her art teacher had given them an assignment to draw their house. When Beth finished, her teacher pointed out all types of errors and told her that her roof could not possibly look the way that she had drawn it. However, Beth went on to describe to me her childhood home. Her family owned a bar and restaurant down by a canal on a dead-end street. They lived above it and it was not your typical-looking home with typical-looking rooflines. When she insisted to her art teacher that this was what her home really looked like, her teacher said she doubted it. This experience made a huge impression on Beth and resurfaced in later years when she resented her high school art teacher for similar reasons. Evidently everyone’s work needed to be the “cookie-cutter” same, or that there was some nebulous criteria that qualified art as “good” or “right.” Jack said he majored in art in high school, then laughed saying, “If you can say you majored in something in high school at all.” He said he continued on at the local county’s community college, attempting to earn an Associate’s degree in ‘Fine Arts’ because he had “hoped for a future in it” but soon quit. He said with a sad sigh that he felt it was not “...a realistic plan for his future.” He wanted to “do art” (as a career) but no one could give him an example of a way to make “good money” in it except for teaching. He said with frustration, “I was never really told what I could get out of an education in art.” I asked him who he had questioned about art occupations. He said his high school guidance counselor, his art teachers, and his college advisor. He said, in a somewhat resentful tone, that none of them could give him specific occupations that would realistically make the type of money that he had ambitions to make. He finally decided that he wanted a guarantee of financial stability, “Being an artist is a lifestyle. You have to love it enough to potentially struggle for a

long while to make it big. Even then you may never make it.” I suspected this resentment that I sensed he felt may have carried over to his present apathy towards his child’s early childhood arts education. I asked him if he would support his daughter if, in the future, she chose to pursue a career in the arts. He laughed uncomfortably and said, “I suppose if she was extremely talented, but I don’t want to end up supporting a ‘starving artist’.”

Once again, I was reminded that there are as many ways that the arts can be expensive as there are ways to make it inexpensive. While waiting to conduct my interview with Lara, I watched some children (with late parents) sit at a table and play with homemade play-dough, squishing it in their palms until it oozed from between their tiny knuckles. It was a soft pale peachy color and had a nicer, less rubbery texture. When I inquired, Lara told me they had just made a fresh batch today and explained that the kids love to make it and offered me the recipe. “It’s so much cheaper because we go through so much of it throughout the year.” Hence, the issue of visual arts materials being expensive for a preschool came up during my interview with Lara. She lamented that she could not have the children use art materials like canvas for painting. I talked about some of the cheap, easy, and fun things I do with my daughter at home: drawing with shaving cream in the bathtub, bathtub crayons, drawing in the steam of the shower doors, making art from sticks and stones, and painting rocks. Lara shared some of the things that she does with the preschool, “We do lots of activities with paper plates because they are inexpensive, like painting half the plate then folding it in half to see if creates a fun picture; for example the children may think it looks like a frog with two bulging eyes!” She gushed, “One of my favorites is rubbing markers onto coffee filters then using spray bottles to make the colors bleed. It makes this cool watercolor-like effect!” I have seen the preschoolers then turn those filters into fun flowers using pipe-cleaners for stems and leaves. Lara said that while learning the colors of the rainbow the children use Fruit Loops, sort and separate the colors, and glue them onto paper to

form their own rainbows. She said with her usual enthusiasm, “I have a ton of seashells I got on vacation that the kids love to use to do rubbings and see what kind of marks they can make.” She also described how she uses their painted handprints to make all sorts of things like turkeys, flags, Santa Claus, and flowers, and how she uses their thumbprints to make bumblebees. Her resourcefulness goes a long way.

In interviews, two participants complained they didn’t know where they could take children this young to pay to advance their artistic and aesthetic development. Jenna said, “If there were more programs, or advertised more, and more conveniently located, I would think about doing it.” She pays for private preschool-age Spanish lessons in their home, so I inquired why she felt motivated to do so. She said because she heard so much advocating for children to start a second language while very young. Another mother Kara, said she had attended an art museum with her children but wasn’t able to enjoy the experience. She explained she was, “...very nervous that they were going to ruin something, touch something, or knock over something! As a mother, I was intimidated by the whole thing!” She continued, “If I’m not doing a lot of aesthetic experiences with my children, it’s due to lack of...convenience.” She feels the art museums in our area need more hands-on things for kids to do and to become “more child-friendly.” I inquired of another parent, Faith, if she felt the same about these issues raised by Jenna and Kara. Faith knew of three relatively nearby children’s art programs that she has taken her children to, but agreed that there is a definite lack of advertising and poor marketing on behalf of these institutions.

To conclude, my inquiry unearthed multiple revelations concerning artistic and aesthetic development in early childhood:

- 1) A lack of advocacy regarding the benefits of the arts in early childhood
- 2) A lack of arts advertising or gearing of the arts towards preschool age children

- 3) Parents perspective that the arts are too expensive
- 4) Parents perceptions of the arts as too much work/too messy
- 5) Questioning of age ability/comprehension
- 6) Placing less value on the arts than other academic or extra-curricular activities
- 7) Parents questioning job opportunities for a future in the arts
- 8) Parents own discouragement or resentment regarding the arts
- 9) A lack of awareness of their role in early childhood artistic and aesthetic development
- 10) A reliance on the preschool teacher for this area of development
- 11) Parents feeling a lack of confidence, knowledge, or skill to facilitate in this area of early childhood development

These types of reasons hinder the process of preschoolers attaining a full and complete art education within the critical first five years of their development.

### **Illumination and Exaltation**

During the course of my interviews, I kept seeing sparks of excitement. Moments where I thought to myself, “Now they are getting it!” Throughout my interviews I felt that our conversations were presenting these important adults with worthy moments of self-reflection, inspiration, and motivation.

While asking Dean if he ever talks to his children about the artwork they create and he smiled and said, “No...but now you’re making me think I should!” When I asked him about musical instruments he said that his son, who just turned five, can name most of them by ear when listening to music, but feels he lacks the attention span and focus to have any type of lessons at this age. Then he said, “Now you have me thinking though...maybe it’s the lessons that would give him the focus and help create that attention span?” Kara she said she loves the theater

because her parents always took them to Toronto to see “all the big shows” growing up such as: Phantom of the Opera, Cats, Les Miserables. She said she has a friend that takes her kids to do “all that stuff already” but at this age her kids “just wouldn’t be able to handle it”. Then she wondered out loud if it is because they have not grown up doing those things already that that is the reason why they could not handle it yet? I loved when adults had these little epiphanies during my interviews. I told her that my daughter has been going to live music, dance, and theater, since she was a toddler and that she has an infinite attention span for it all and can sit enthralled and well behaved through anything. I explained that in comparison, when I took my daughter and her friend to a movie and a few weeks later, to a play, her friend could barely make it through both events. Though she is a year older than my daughter, she did not know how to behave in a movie theater and did not grasp the concept of watching a play. Both experiences, I found out later, where “firsts” for this five-year-old child. In my mind, that clearly explained her inattentiveness and lack of appreciation.

After reading aloud parts of my Chapters I and II, as context for the questions I was asking during the interviews, parents immediately seemed to become more interested. For example, after I read to Jenna about the benefits of music lessons in early childhood, she proclaimed that now she will enroll all of her four girls in piano lessons. Reactions like hers led me to conclude the need for improved early childhood arts advocacy. The supposition here being that more advocacies and social pressure, such as those found in the area of second languages, would prompt preschool parents and teachers to inculcate a more thorough early arts education.

Four parents out of eleven interviewed said that they view it as their obligation to give their children an early arts education. The other seven parents said that they rely on the preschool for that development. One father, Dean, told me that he admits to focusing more on other “academics” with his children, but added that “without a doubt” he sees the value in an education

in the arts. At the end of our interview he said, “To me, it’s part of a classical education. My father had a very ‘European education.’ Not to be a snob... but knowing about literature, knowing about art...it’s just part of what was expected of me and what I’ll be expecting of them.” His wife Kara said she believes that she plays the primary role in giving her preschoolers arts experiences and that she relies on the Pre -K to give them, “...the more academic knowledge base to prepare them for Kindergarten.” Another mother, Elise, said, “I certainly wouldn’t depend on a preschool to provide the rich experiences (in the arts) that I can give my children myself outside the classroom.”

From my in-depth interview with Lara, the preschool teacher, I can say with certainty that these children are receiving lots of arts during their time spent in preschool. Lara said of their daily routine, “There is always an art activity or a craft activity that involves cutting, sorting, patterning, gluing, coloring; something with a fine motor component.” However, the arts experiences that the preschool provided were similar to those provided in the home; the adult supplying the materials more as a normal part of childhood entertainment and less for the benefit of artistic and aesthetic development. My interview with Lara did however reveal that she is playing the role of the more knowledgeable other while using the arts as a way to connect to other areas of academic learning:

Lara: I used to have an art easel for the room but it caused problems because only two children could use it at a time. So now what I have been doing is rolling out this large paper roll on the floor. It works so much better because it can accommodate the whole class! The kids just flock to both sides of it with whatever we’re using... crayons, markers, or colored pencils. Then I encourage them to do something that goes with the theme of the unit that we’re studying, like a (science-based) unit on ocean life.

Me: Do you notice that the kids will stay on task longer you are near them giving them those examples of what to draw and encouraging them?

Lara: Yes absolutely. A few kids may draw a little bit here and there but it never evolves into a fully themed mural unless myself or the other two adults (teacher's helpers) lie on the floor and draw with them. Then it becomes an incredible jungle! Or an ocean full of creatures! I'll ask them questions like, 'Who would live in this jungle or ocean? Would the animals here need some grass or plants to eat? Should we draw boats to sail in this ocean?' We all start brainstorming and it becomes this fabulous mural!

Intrigued by this, I asked Lara if she does any specific art or aesthetic lessons in her preschool. She winced and apologetically explained, "I'm so sorry (long pause) that's just not been my priority here." She asked me for a moment to think. After a brief pause she said:

There is a story that I read to the children each year while they are learning their colors (*White Rabbit's Color Book*) about a rabbit that hops from one pot of paint to another, changing colors as he goes, until he ends up turning brown from all the colors he's been through! Then I have them do an activity where we put different combinations of paint colors in baggies and let them smoosh it all around to see what colors they can make!

Again I was intrigued, until she said, "I can't really think of anything else at the moment that you would consider being 'an art lesson'." Then I asked about music:

Lara: Absolutely. We spend a portion of time each day doing "music & motion" where we play games like 'freeze dance' and sometimes use our instruments.

Me: So you have musical instruments? Not just toy instruments?

Lara: Well they are nothing special trust me! Just ones that people have donated or I've somehow acquired through the years. There's a tambourine, a triangle,

cymbals, drums, stuff like that. I'd love to purchase some new ones but it's just not in the budget, some other need here always comes up!

She told me that they also sing songs for easier transitions, for instance, from free time to circle time and has each preschool class put on a play for their parents at the end of each school year. I asked her about teaching her students vocabulary such as texture or portrait. She said she does not use those two specifically, but does use some art terms like illustrator and collage. When I asked if she talks to her student's about their art she said yes, she has the kids explain their art by asking them, "What is this?" As for looking at or discussing professional works of art:

Lara: No, we don't. (Long pause). But wait, isn't that like when I read a book to the class? Because we look at the pictures and talk about them and even try to predict what will happen!

Me: I was referring more to a single work of art, like a painting or a sculpture.

Lara: Hmm. Well, probably if it was a realistic painting the kids could talk about it and answer questions, but I'm just not sure? Give me an example!

Me: Okay, umm, the one it seems like every elementary art teacher out there uses, Starry Night by Van Gogh.

Lara: Oh. No. I don't think they would be able to talk about a work like that.

Me: Why?

Lara: Just because of their age and lack of vocabulary. I think that for them, looking at a work of art would be just like them looking at illustrations in a book.

She held up her finger while she walked away, signaling me to wait. She quickly returned with two books. One realistically drawn, and the other much more unusual and artistic- using shapes, line, and color in a more abstract and creative way. I pointed out to her the reasons why I thought it would be more useful to use the latter book to have an aesthetic discussion. For instance the

illustrator of the latter book used color to convey the mood and setting while the first illustrator made “the sun yellow, the grass green, etc.” She said, “I’m sorry but that hasn’t been my intention when choosing books. Usually we are talking about the storyline, the characters, and the lesson it teaches. But maybe I could present a work of art to the class and see what they say and let you know?” I told her that would be really interesting but was entirely up to her. She said she would like to and exclaimed, “You really have me thinking now!” Kindler (1995) said that in the same way preschool teachers assist a child in gaining skills such as writing, so they also possess the ability to enhance areas of artistic and aesthetic growth.

Next I asked Lara about feeling pressured to teach kindergarten readiness vs. teaching the arts. She responded:

I used to feel really accountable to parents to do all that, until I realized that they were missing the basics. They (the children) could tell you the sound the letter B makes, but not know how to solve a problem as simple as where they were going to sit or how to socially interact within a group. Now I scaffold their experiences to learn these things through creative-play type activities and experiences using things like the arts to teach how to be a part of a group as well as the basics they are expected to learn.

Lara understandably uses the language of an Early Childhood Educator and sees her preschool pedagogy from that perspective, rather than that of an Art Educator. Towards the end of our conversation, Lara and I both came to mutual conclusion that she uses the arts consistently in her preschool, not to teach artistic or aesthetic development per say, but as a main vehicle for their learning. We agreed that she may not purposefully be teaching with the same objectives as an art teacher, but at the very least, she is giving preschoolers exposure to arts activities and experiences on a routine basis. My time spent with Lara reminded me how easily early childhood lends itself to the arts.

One of my favorite moments recently was running into one of the parents, Kara, whom I had interviewed two months earlier. She said with excitement, “Oh you should see her (three-year-old daughter) now! Since our interview we’ve been getting more art books from the library. She has a book on masterpieces in art and we’ve been quizzing her by showing her the pictures and she’ll say, ‘Pic-asso’ or ‘Mon-dri-an’! She has memorized most of the book!” Impressive!

### **Conclusion**

Evidently, four of the eleven parents are attempting to contribute to the aesthetic learning or artistic instruction for their preschooler. In contrast, relaxed perspectives regarding early artistic and aesthetic development may be attributed to the changing values and views of modern parents due largely to the impact of technology in the twenty-first century. My research also revealed a plethora of other reasons that discourage and deter adults from instilling an early arts education, as described in pages 42-48 of this document. My final finding revealed how my interviews seemed to have had a resounding effect on participants which prompted an increased awareness of their role and an improved interest in early childhood arts education.

The findings of my study obviously varied greatly, as each participant is an individual, yet these four categories above stood out as meaningful discoveries within the realm of adult led early childhood arts education. Chapter V will discuss the implications of my findings.

## **Chapter V: Implications and Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

As mentioned in Chapter I of this document, I found little research from others focusing on the roles parents and preschool teachers believe they play in art education and the contributions that they make to artistic and aesthetic development in early childhood. I felt the need for deeper examination into the roles adults play in young children's artistic and aesthetic development. My study provided a glimpse into that gap in the literature.

### **Implications**

Seven of the eleven adults that I interviewed were generally apathetic about preschooler's artistic and aesthetic development. Our conversations offered several explanations for such laissez-faire perspectives. Therefore, if parents were convinced of the importance of the arts in early childhood development, they might be more willing to take time and put forth more effort involved in such facilitation. As an anecdote, our culture has convinced parents of the physical benefits of young children partaking in exercise, yet parents are less concerned with gaining the numerous emotional, social, and cognitive benefits correlated to involvement in the arts. I saw a humorous quote the other day; it said, "Maybe you should eat some makeup so you can be pretty on the inside too." That our society places so much emphasis on the superficial outer self, with less on constructing the inner self, may explain some parents' casual views on the importance of the arts in peoples' lives.

Additionally, my research found technology and other changes in our culture influenced the behaviors and viewpoints of modern parents towards early childhood arts education. Since technology will not be going away, I believe that we must, as parents, do our best to use technology to benefit artistic and aesthetic development. Parents can guide young children towards television programs which involve the arts and choose apps which facilitate creating or

experiencing art. Furthermore, adults should make a conscientious effort with young children to include the arts in their lives in ways that humanity has used the arts in the past: to tell stories, to document one's existence or feelings, as a way for elders to impart knowledge and create memories with children, and so on.

Besides the changes I reflected on above, many other reasons stood out in explanation for the shortcomings I found in early childhood artistic and aesthetic development. For example, some parents expressed a lack in marketing and availability of arts for preschool age children. While there are places to take young children, and special art programs and events, one must actively seek such information. One usually can locate many free or low cost art activities and experiences in communities. Also better advertising could reshape the perspective that the arts are too expensive. Those who question age ability/comprehension need only to learn how to have conversations with their child and ask questions to elicit responses. I believe that most parents will find an eager learner and feel a proud sense of accomplishment in attempting to teach their child slightly above their developmental level. As for adults placing less value on the arts than other academic or extra-curricular activities and questioning job opportunities for a future in the arts, again, the arts need more advocates. The benefits have been proven by renowned researchers. Careers exist in the arts. However, as teachers, we cannot assume its obviousness; people need to be reminded of the connections the arts have to practically every aspect of our world. Regarding parents own discouragement or resentment regarding the arts or their feeling a lack of confidence, knowledge, or skill to facilitate in this area of early childhood development, clearly society and past institutions of art education have failed many a student. Perhaps many of these parents are products of Lowenfeld's child-centered approach. Whatever the case may be, we can only strive to provide future generations with a better art education, a clearer understanding, and a deeper confidence as advocates for the arts.

Parents lack awareness of their important role in early childhood artistic and aesthetic development; and often they rely solely on the preschool teacher for this area of development. Perhaps as parents we need to reflect on the goals we set for ourselves as parents. I would caution parents not to rely on the institutions they pay to be their child's only teacher. For example, after completing this study, I am now aware that the areas of artistic progress and especially aesthetic development are not part of Lakeshore Pre-K's pedagogy and curriculum. Thus being informed, I am now mindful to step up my teaching even further at home. Even in preschools that do focus on such development, learning should be complimentary, and encouraged both in school and at home.

Finally, with more information and help, adult interest can be piqued or improved to enable them to better facilitate an early arts education. It seems that perhaps their own past K-12 art education, or college in some cases, failed to teach the benefits of the arts. We cannot blame adults for not knowing what they do not know. If they are unaware of their role, how can they be playing it? My research leads me to believe that this important part of child development will remain undernourished unless there is increased education and advocacy regarding the benefits of early childhood arts education. Hopefully more studies such as this may motivate parents and teachers of young children in our society to facilitate further development in this area.

### **Suggestions for Advancement in the Field**

The results of this study allude to a need for improved early childhood arts education and advocacy. Adults who I informed of the studies regarding the limited window of time for optimum brain development and my correlation to the significance of arts in early childhood development, showed new interest and motivation. Therefore demonstrating that our field must do more to promote and emphasize the benefits of the arts in early childhood to parents and preschool teachers. Art educators must convince parents and preschool teachers of the

significance of artistic and aesthetic growth in human development. We need more informed adults; they are important contributing factors of artistic and aesthetic development for preschoolers. Once parents are aware of their role as the more knowledgeable other, they must then apply the concept of scaffolding to produce the targeted zone of proximal development. My findings echoed that of Kindler's (1995) research in which she concluded, "We must clarify and stress the fact that active adult participation in this process of growth need not be detrimental and may well be in fact, necessary." This study further revealed the need for more public arts accessibility and availability for this preschool age demographic.

### **Suggestions for Parents and Teachers of Preschoolers**

Since beginning this study, I found that if I engage my child in a higher level conversation, she responds with a higher level response. On a daily basis parents can build their child's ability to defend one's aesthetic sense by questioning their child's preferences. I now make a greater effort to discuss with her the beauty found in nature, the illustrations in her books, and simply to converse with her about the arts, including popular visual culture, as it naturally presents itself in daily life. By teaching aesthetics, children will learn to understand that there is more than one way to interpret a work of art. They will learn that viewing art is based on individual perspectives formed from their own cultural and social experiences (Mayesky, 2002). Parents can create experiences and preschool teachers can create lessons that promote opportunities to explore attitudes, feelings, and ideas through and about art. Art experiences can take many forms, from reading and listening, to creating. Art museums, galleries, films, videos, and books as well as dance performances, music concerts, and poetry readings are plentiful, often free or at a low cost (Gaspar, 1995, p. 44). Preschoolers can be provided with age appropriate activities that spark curiosity and create interest and awareness of the arts. Preschool teachers can create a once annual art exhibit or designate a permanent space as art gallery in the classroom

used as a rotating showcase. They can include art books in their library and include fine art reproductions and real art objects in their classroom décor (Mayesky, 2002). Due to my observations during this research, I can attest to the fact that many children do not have professional art or art objects in their own homes. Gaspar (1995, p. 45) wrote, “Part of teaching is providing an environment and materials. As a facilitator, the teacher encourages learning by responding in a sensitive way to interactions between the child and the environment.” Colbert and Taunton (1992) suggest three major themes that are evident in high-quality early education:

- 1) Children need many opportunities to create art.
- 2) Children need many opportunities to look at and talk about art.
- 3) Children need to be become aware of art in their everyday lives.

Every parent and teacher should ask themselves if they are assisting children to complete these objectives.

### **Recommendations for Further Inquiry**

Further studies of a similar nature could be conducted using the site of study as a Universal Pre-K instead of a private preschool; participants in my study had already made a financial investment in their child’s education. Also, the sample was taken from middle to upper class participants, most of whom were college educated, financially secure, and living in a rural area. It would be very interesting to conduct the same study using a lower socio-economic demographic or an urban setting. Another area for further consideration would be to study what other preschool teachers or daycare centers are doing in regards to artistic and aesthetic development.

### **Conclusion**

In this final chapter I have discussed the implications of my study and given recommendations for further inquiry into this subject, as well as made suggestions for the

advancement of the field and for the adults who are the contributing factors of artist and aesthetic development in early childhood.

Listening to the perspectives of my participants shed new light on the priorities and values of the adults who presently shape the lives of thirty-two preschoolers. This study was my contribution to the necessity for further inquiry into the field of early childhood art education. Early childhood is a finite window of opportune time that passes quickly for children, their parents, and preschool teachers, and the experiences during that time ultimately result in the future of our society. The arts remain a vital part of that education.

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### Appendix A

<b>The Arts Play an Important Role in Early Childhood Development</b>	<b>Adult Significance in Early Artistic &amp; Aesthetic Development</b>	<b>The Significance of Environment in Early Artistic &amp; Aesthetic Development</b>
Fox, J. & Berry, S. (2008). Art in early childhood: Curriculum connections.	Vygotsky, L. (1978). Mind in Society.	Diamond, M., & Hopson, J. (1998). Magic trees of the mind: How to nurture your child's intelligence, creativity, and healthy emotions from birth through adolescence.
Meiners, J. (2005). In the beginning: Young children and arts education.	Caldwell, B. (2006). Re-imagining educational leadership.	Larson, Gary. (1997). The American canvas.
Koster, J. (2012). Growing artists: Teaching the arts to young children.	Hertzog, N. B. (2001). Reflections and impressions from Reggio Emilia.	Koster, J. (2012). Growing artists: Teaching the arts to young children.
Bresler, L. & Thompson, C. (Eds.). (2002). The arts in children's lives: Context, culture, and curriculum.	Koppman, D. (2002). Transformation, invocation, and magic in contemporary art, education, and criticism: Reinvesting art with a sense of the sacred.	Tarr, P. (2001). Aesthetic codes in early childhood classrooms: What art educators can learn from ReggioEmilia
Szekely, G. (1991). From play to art.	Dewey, J. (1934). Art as experience.	Parsons, M. (1994). Can children do aesthetics? A developmental account.
Gaudelius, Y. & Speirs, P. (Eds.). (2002). Contemporary issues in art education.	Lowenfeld, V. (1947). Creative and mental growth.	
Jalongo, M. & Stamp, L. (1997). The art in children's lives: Aesthetic education in early childhood.	Kindler, A. M. (1995). Significance of adult input in early childhood artistic development.	
	Berk, L. E. & Winsler, A. (1995). Scaffolding children's learning: Vygotsky and early childhood education.	

## Appendix B

### Informed Consent

Dear Preschool Owner/Teacher:

As a graduate student at Buffalo State College, I am conducting a study on the contributing factors of artistic and aesthetic development in early childhood as a part of the fulfillments of a master's degree in Art Education. The use of your facility for observation and access to your student's parents for purposes of interviews and questionnaires would greatly benefit my study.

I intend to collect my data through observation, emailed questionnaires, and conversations with parents of preschoolers in our area. I would also like to interview you about arts practices (visual art, music, dance, drama, etc.) in your school, and possibly take photographs of your student's artwork and preschool environment. I would also ask your preschooler's parents to participate in emailed questionnaires about their children's arts activities outside the school. My study involves only the primary adults in a preschooler's life and does not require the interviewing or observing of any children.

Your participation will be helpful to my research project and is completely voluntary. Risks to you and your child are minimal and no greater than those encountered in everyday life. All information will be confidential and used for educational research purposes only. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identities of all sites and participants involved in the study.

I would ask parent participants to sign optional Consent to Participate forms before receiving my emailed questionnaires or participating in any interviews.

I would certainly appreciate your permission of this request to advance my graduate research at Buffalo State College and to further education regarding artistic and aesthetic development in early childhood.

Thank you,

Caitlin M. White

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I will participate in the study as described above.

-OR-

I will not participate in the study described above.

Your Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

### Informed Consent

Dear Preschool Parent or Guardian:

As a graduate student at Buffalo State College, I am conducting a research study on the contributing factors of artistic and aesthetic development in early childhood as a part of the fulfillments of a master's degree in Art Education. The purpose of my study is in no way judgmental, rather it is a qualitative study, which is used to gain insights into the feelings and behaviors of people, an understanding of the world through other's eyes, and causes of certain behaviors and phenomenon. My qualitative research will gain implications and recommendations for the fields of Art Education and Early Childhood Development.

I will be collecting data through interviews and conversations with parents of preschoolers and preschool teachers, as well as observing preschooler's environments. I will also be gathering data through use of emailed questionnaires to parent participants. My study does not involve your child; rather it will only involve your adult participation in answering one or more emailed questionnaires and possibly a request for an interview. At any point, you may withdraw from the study with no questions asked.

Your participation will be helpful to my research project and is completely voluntary. Risks are minimal for you or your students and no greater than those encountered in everyday life. All information will be confidential and used for research purposes only.

Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identities of all sites and participants involved.

I would certainly appreciate your permission of this request to advance my graduate research at Buffalo State College and to further education regarding early childhood art education.

You may always contact me at any time per the email addresses or phone number below. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Caitlin M. White

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I will participate in the study described above.

-OR-

I will not participate in the study described above.

Your Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

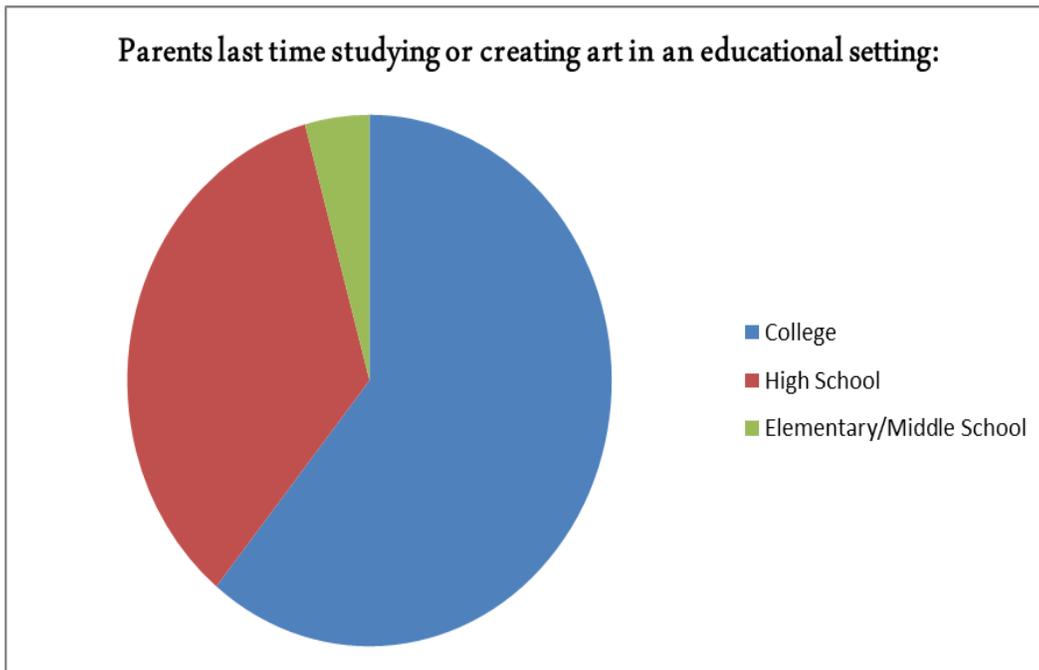
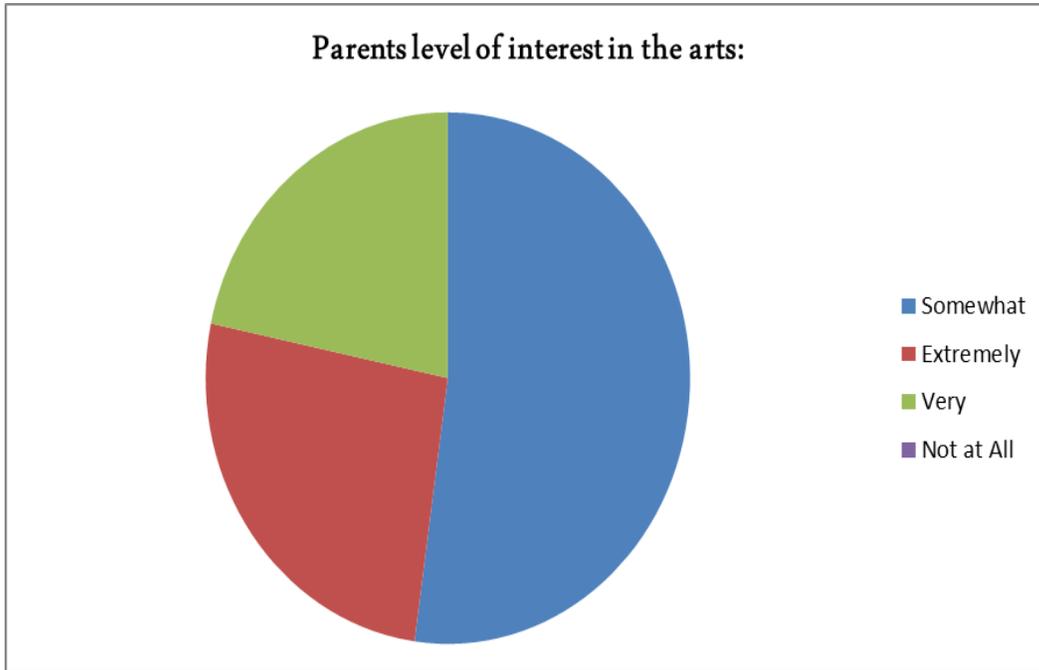
Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

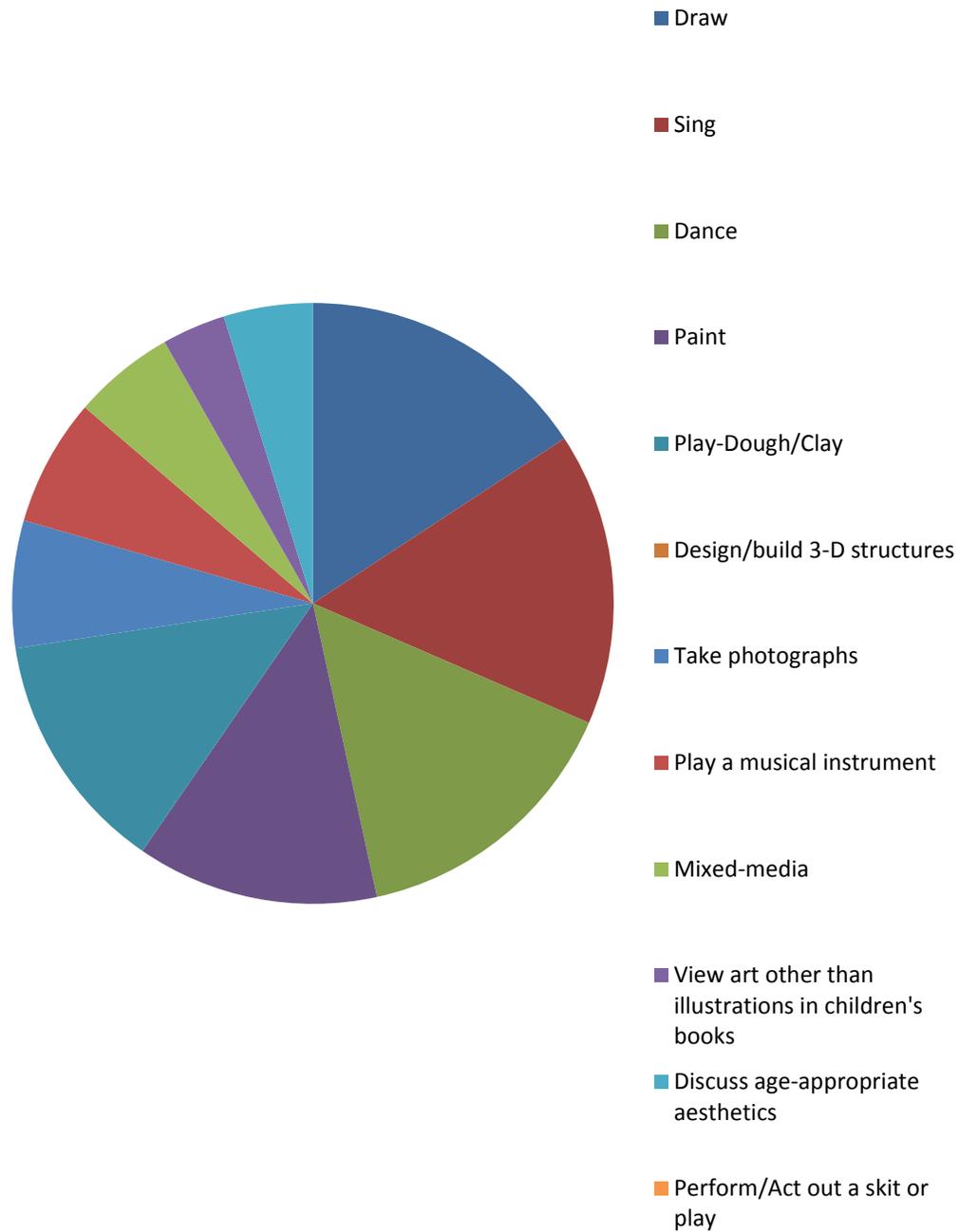
### **\*Semi-Structured Interview with Adults/Sample Conversation Questions:**

- What is your personal background in art? / What art experiences have you had? / How did they influence your feelings about each of the arts?
- What types of art does your child create/experience? How often? In what ways do you participate?
- Which musical genres is your child exposed to on a regular basis? Does anyone in your family play a musical instrument? If so, what type? Do they perform for your child? Does your child practice any musical instruments?
- Does your child take dance or make up dances? Do they perform for others?
- Does your child know any art vocabulary or artist occupations? Are there any art techniques that your child would be able to explain?
- Have you ever taken your child to live music, theater, dance, performance art, or other types of live performances?
- What kinds of materials can your child use to create art with at home? Do you buy materials or do they use found material?
- Do you talk to your child about what they make? How do they describe their work to you?
- What do you do with work they bring home? Do you have a special place for displaying your child's artwork?
- Which types of art are displayed within your home? (paintings/photographs/sculptures) Do you talk to your child about them or what reactions have they had to them?
- Does your child regularly make art or dance or make music or put on plays or skits? In what ways do you see that they use art to express themselves/their feelings and thoughts?
- Do you and your child go to art museums or places that display art? Where else does your child view art?
- Do you talk to your child/teach them during or after an arts experience?
- Does your child play a sport? Is there a charge for them to play?
- What spaces in your home can your child use to create art?
- When do you talk to your child about the arts?
- What is your biggest concern about the education of your child?

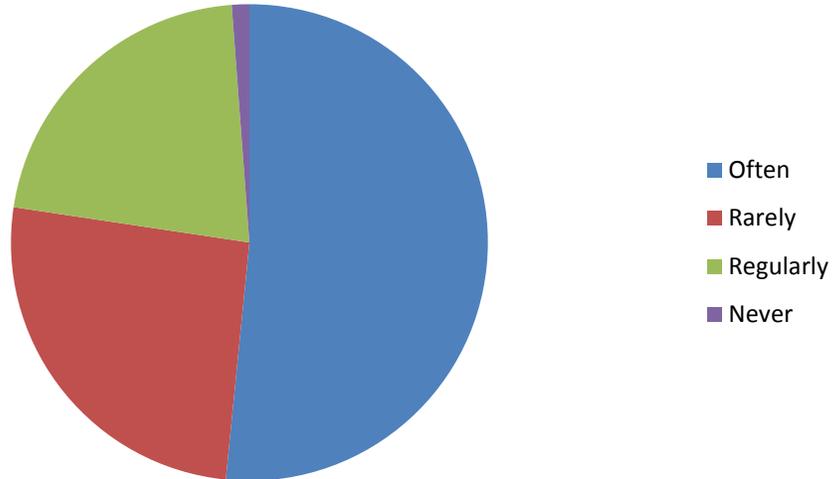
### Appendix E



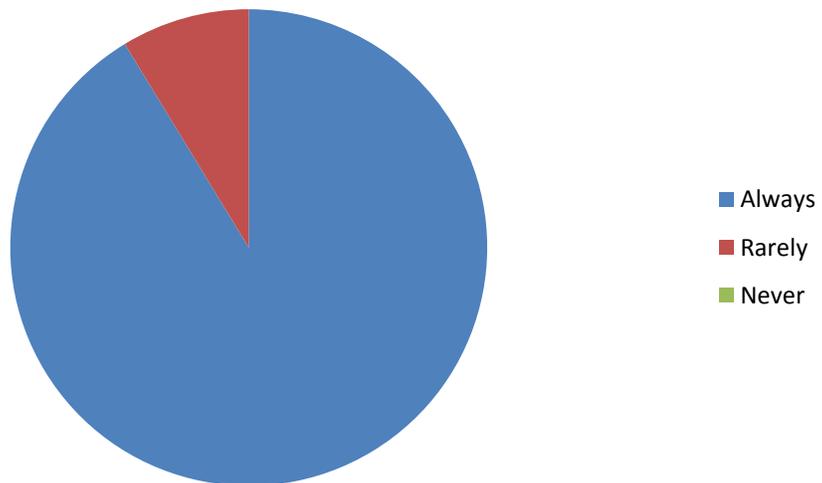
### Preschooler's home arts activities on a regular basis:



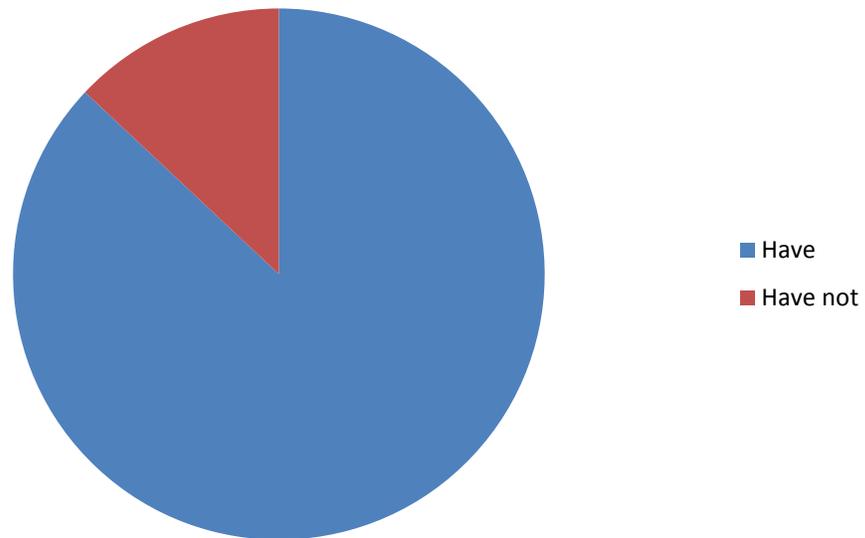
**How often parents engage their preschooler in conversations that facilitate their learning about the arts:**



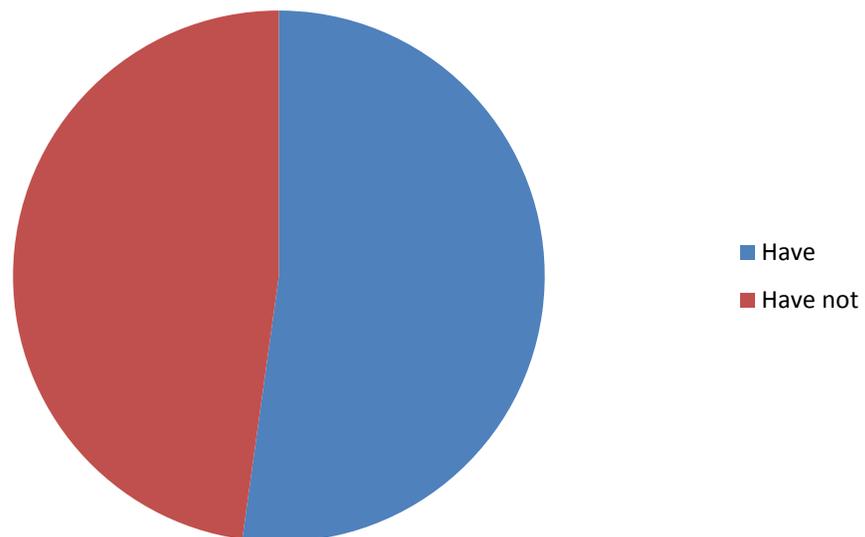
**How often parents display their child's creative work in their home:**



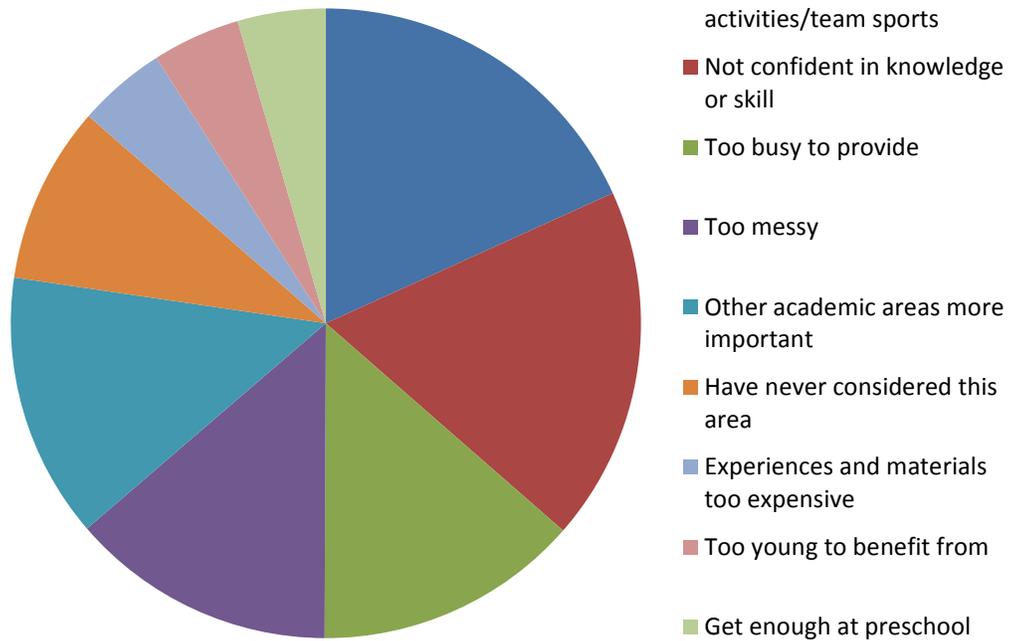
**Preschoolers who have attended live theater/performance art:**



**Preschoolers who have experienced an art museum:**



**Reasons that discourage parents from artistic and aesthetic development:**



## Appendix F

**DATA COLLECTION METHODS:**

- Interviews
- Questionnaire
- Observations

**PROBLEM STATEMENT:**  
Research is limited concerning the role of adults as contributing factors to artistic & aesthetic development in early childhood.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**  
Central Question:  
What insights can be gained by examining the role of parents and preschool teachers as contributing factors of artistic and aesthetic development in early childhood?  
Sub-Questions:  
What routines, activities, environments, and experiences do these adults provide to facilitate the artistic and aesthetic development of young children?  
What prompts or deters preschool parents and teachers to inculcate an early arts education?  
What attitudes and beliefs do parents and preschool teachers hold regarding the artistic and aesthetic development of preschool age children?  
What contributions can this research make for the field of early childhood art education?

**FINDINGS:**  
The Apathy in Adults: Many adults are apathetic regarding artistic and aesthetic development in early childhood.  
Twenty-First Century Implications: Changes in our technology and culture have impacted early childhood art education.  
Autant De Raisons: There are multiple reasons that discourage adults from facilitating artistic & aesthetic development in early childhood.  
Illumination and Exaltation: Adults showed motivation through increased awareness of their roles, education, and arts advocacy.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE:**

- The Arts Play an Important Role in Early Childhood Development
- Adult Significance in Early Artistic & Aesthetic Development
- The Significance of Environment in Early Artistic & Aesthetic Development

*A Qualitative Case Study:  
Adults as Contributing Factors to  
Artistic and Aesthetic Development  
in Early Childhood  
by Cristin White*