Parent-Oriented Perspectives of Early Childhood Art Education: The Challenges and Strengths of Out-of-School Art Programs in Taiwan and The United States

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Parents’ intentions and actions are crucial factors that influence young children’s early art learning experiences. By learning about parents’ perspectives and experiences related to art educators, art education, and placing their children in an out-of-school art program, researchers can gain an in-depth understanding of parents’ values about art education. Further, analysis of the parents’ attitude and resourcefulness about early childhood art education helps art educators develop positive communication with parents. The purpose of this research is to probe the contexts and experiences of parents in Taiwan and the United States when they place their children in an out-of-school art program.

This study is a dual-case, cross-cultural, phenomenological qualitative study, using interviews, observations, and artifact collection as data collection approaches. Two research sites were included in this research. The first site was in DeKalb, Illinois, US, focusing on the Northern Illinois University (NIU) Art Express Saturday art program, which is a university outreach art program for the local community. The second site was in Taipei, Taiwan, and took place in the National Taipei University of Education (NTUE) Children’s Art Camp and a private children’s art program called Magic Power of Art in Taipei City. In this study, I delved into the
context of each research site, including the communities and parents’ social/ cultural capitals, and analyzed how the contexts influenced the participants’ mindset regarding placing their children in out-of-school art programs.

The findings showed that community structures, resource accessibility, and district atmosphere were significant components of the parent-participants’ exosystem. Those components profoundly and inadvertently shaped their social and cultural capitals. Additionally, the parent-participants’ art-related experiences and the influences of peer groups constituted their mesosystem, which further enhanced or sculpted their social and cultural capitals as well as their perspectives toward art learning. Moreover, parent-child interactions and in-class dynamics were the direct microsystems that demonstrated the practices of the parent-participants’ parenting approaches. Furthermore, the parent-participants’ educational philosophy, perspectives toward art, descriptions of the art programs, and descriptions of children’s art productions constituted their reflective thought, which was the impetus for their parenting approaches and purposes for selecting out-of-school learning for their children.

Also, this research revealed the hidden issue of information asymmetry between art teachers and parents. In other words, parents’ expectations of art education did not always align with current critical conversations in the field of art education. Because parents are vital stakeholders in education, art educators must develop an effective communication channel with parents to ensure children’s better in-school and out-of-school art learning environments. Having sustainable support from parents allows art education to continuously grow and thrive in the K-12 school system and communities.
PARENT-ORIENTED PERSPECTIVES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD ART EDUCATION:
THE CHALLENGES AND STRENGTHS OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL ART PROGRAMS
IN TAIWAN AND THE UNITED STATES

BY

MENG-JUNG YANG
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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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Doctoral Director:
Kerry Freedman
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DEDICATION

To my dearest Newt and Bean

for their unconditional love and support
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CHAPTER 1

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Statement of the Problem

Educational policies and educational institutions around the world have marginalized art education due, in part, to dominating discourses that prioritize short-term profit for immediate societal utility (Belfiore, 2015; Chao & Yang, 2011; McClure, Tarr, Thompson & Eckhoff, 2017; Olmos-Penuela, Benneworth & Castro-Martinez, 2015; Yang, 2009). Art is treated as an elective discipline and forced to fit a standardized frame that cannot actually embody the value of art (Lackey & Huxhold, 2016; McClure, Tarr, Thompson & Eckhoff, 2017). To address this challenge, some scholars have investigated the impact of educational policy on art curricula and the professional readiness of art teachers (Brewer, 2006; Parkes & Powell, 2015; Robert Sabol, 2013), while others have advocated for leadership in art education and developed position statements to create inroads for collaborative dialogue among art educators, policy makers, and stakeholders (Freedman, 2011; McClure, Tarr, Thompson & Eckhoff, 2017). Some scholars point out that an ordinary top-down advocacy agenda is insufficient for ameliorating the circumstances of art education, and they claim parents and stakeholders in the community can be significant agencies that force policymaking from the bottom up (Wiley & García, 2016).

In-school and out-of-school art learning provides different enrichment opportunities that constitute and transform children’s art learning experiences and their perspective toward art (Green & Kindseth, 2011; Shin & Kim, 2014). Out-of-school art programs are popular options
that serve students’ various forms of art learning beyond the formal art curriculum in school settings. When investigating young children’s art learning experiences within an out-of-school art program, scholars and educators mostly focus on the issues that relate to curriculum, learning environment, teacher-student interactions, and the learners themselves but rarely address parents. However, parental influence is an inseparable factor because parents are the gatekeepers who determine their children’s art learning opportunities (Hsiao & Kuo, 2013; Hsiao & Pai, 2014; Parsad & Lewis, 2009).

The parent-child dynamic and how it influences child development, learning, and behaviors are essential topics for many researchers in family science and child development-related fields (e.g., de Oliveira & Jackson, 2017; Pino-Pasternak, Whitebread, & Tolmie, 2010). Because parents’ influence on their children is profound and lasting, it directly shapes children’s values, sense of being artistic, perspectives of art, interests in art, and out-of-school art learning opportunities (Hsiao & Kuo, 2013; Hsiao & Pai, 2014; Parsad & Lewis, 2009). However, parental influences are rarely discussed in K-12 and community-based art education-related studies. Thus, the purpose of this research was to probe the contexts and experiences of parents in Taiwan and the United States when they place their children in an out-of-school art program.

Research on Out-Of-School Art Programs

Although complex, out-of-school programs generally refer to informal learning settings in contrast with formal school learning. A report of out-of-school programs in public elementary schools conducted by the US Department of Education (Parsad & Lewis, 2009) categorizes formal out-of-school programs into four types: 1) fee-based stand-alone day care programs, 2) stand-alone academic instruction/tutoring programs, 3) the 21st century community learning
centers (21st CCLCs) and 4) other types of formal stand-alone or broad-based out-of-school programs. Among these four types, the broad-based out-of-school programs like 21st CCLCs have components in several areas, such as art, music and drama. According to Otterbourg (2000), “Out-of-school programs provide important access, extension and support to children’s learning and social development” (p. 5). Most importantly, learning through arts in an out-of-school program not only improves students’ higher-order thinking skills, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making, but also engages students in multiple skills and abilities, such as communication, manipulation, interpretation, and understanding of complex symbols (Otterbourg, 2000).

Current out-of-school art program-related scholarship categorizes the objectives of these programs into four kinds: 1) community-based art curriculum (Washington, 2011), 2) culturally-based art curriculum (Briggs & McHenry, 2013; Mason & Chuang, 2001), 3) art-centered curriculum (Green, Kindseth, 2011; Shin & Kim, 2014; Stiegelbauer, 2008; Wright, John & Sheel, 2007), and 4) curriculum for disadvantaged children (Betts, 2006; Mason & Chuang, 2001; Shepard & Booth, 2009; Washington, 2011).

The key task of a community-based art curriculum is to identify a community’s needs and build participatory social relationships and dialogue (Briggs & McHenry, 2013). In addition to being located at public PK-12 schools, some programs are affiliated with museums, universities, YMCAs, daycare centers, nonprofit organizations, and regional culture centers (Shin & Kim, 2014). Moreover, galleries, private art institutions/studios, and franchises also provide different types of out-of-school arts programs to serve public needs (Shin & Kim, 2014). Compared to other types of programs, out-of-school arts programs provided by universities tend to serve as teaching-labs for undergraduate/graduate pre-service teachers (Briggs & Mc henry, 2013;
Lampert, 2007; Mahoney, Levine, & Hinga, 2010; Schwartz & Pace, 2008; Taylor, 2005).

Chung (2000) lists some common elements of successful and quality out-of-school programs, such as goal setting, strong management, sustainability, quality staffing, attention to safety issues, enriching learning opportunities, evaluation of program progress and effectiveness, effective partnerships with community-based organizations, and strong involvement of families. Those elements can be categorized into program structures and community engagement. In other words, structuring the programs to serve communities’ needs and building a positive partnership with communities should be the goals for out-of-school programs.

Culturally-based art curriculum promotes cultural equity and social justice (Briggs & McHenry, 2013). Cultural awareness, pride, and history are key components when integrating and developing culturally relevant curriculum (Mason & Chuang, 2001). Culturally-based art curriculum and community-based art curriculum are interconnected, and both curricula extend students’ learning beyond the classroom and interconnect with students’ families and their real life experiences (Briggs & McHenry, 2013).

Some out-of-school arts programs emphasize art-centered curriculum that develops students’ artistic skills and techniques as one of the priorities for satisfying parents’ expectations (Green & Kindseth, 2011; Shin & Kim, 2014; Wright, John & Sheel, 2007) and to fulfill other educational purposes (Bettes, 2003; Stiegelbauer, 2008). For instance, Stiegelbauer (2008) claims that “no one can claim to be truly educated who lacks basic knowledge and skills in the arts” (p. 40), so a successful program should promote a variety of useful art skills and activities to complete and integrate independent projects (Bettes, 2003).

Out-of-school arts programs that provide curriculum for disadvantaged children usually emphasize the principles of culture and community. These programs recruit students with low
socioeconomic status, poor living conditions, fragmented families, dangerous neighborhoods, mental health afflictions, and/or the presentation of multiple behavioral problems (Mason & Chuang, 2001; Wright, John & Sheel, 2007). Disadvantaged children can benefit from an emphasis on the development of relationships, social structuring, cultural values, and family/peer relationships within a program (Washington, 2011; Wright et al., 2009). In addition, many studies have shown that quality out-of-school arts programs help students increase prosocial behaviors and self-esteem, reduce emotional and behavioral problems, and have better adaptive functioning (Mason & Chuang, 2001; Wright et al., 2009; Wright, John & Sheel, 2007)

Unlike in-school art that must focus on art products and the assessment of students’ learning, out-of-school arts curricula tend to concentrate on intangible qualities, such as representation of identity and interpersonal collaboration (Green & Kindseth, 2011). Many studies have shown the multiple personal and interpersonal impacts on children’s development through art-learning in an out-of-school arts program. For instance, Green and Kindseth’s (2011) research shows that an art-rich environment transforms students’ sense of self, improves personal resilience, and nurtures a passion for learning through creative thinking and practice. Gacherieu’s (2004) research shows that participation in an out-of-school arts program helped students not only increase their academic performance but also their self-esteem. Furthermore, Shin and Kim’s (2014) study reveals that many out-of-school arts programs emphasize developing children’s essential skills as well as psychological, intellectual, and cognitive skills. Moreover, improving interpersonal collaboration and community engagement as well as strengthening family involvement and peer relationships have also been found to be connected to participation in out-of-school arts programs (Afterschool Alliance, 2005; Gacherieu, 2004; Green & Kindseth, 2011; Washington, 2011; Wright, John & Sheel, 2007; Wright et al., 2009).
Children interact with people (e.g., teachers, parents and peers), their environment, and objects in an out-of-school program, all of which significantly influence their art learning experiences and their interpretations of artwork (McClure, 2011; Richards, 2014). Regarding innovative teaching pedagogies and observations of children’s behaviors in an out-of-school visual arts program, McClure (2011) examined the construction process of the myth of inherent creativity and investigated the ambivalent constructions of adults’ attitudes toward children’s arts. She provides an example of negotiated curriculum in her classroom to support her position regarding site-oriented pedagogy. Additionally, she tries to ameliorate a restrictive view of children’s art characterized as either pure expression or a movement through stages toward visual realism. Richards’s (2014) research investigated an early childhood art education to reveal the deeper meanings of children’s art works influenced by different environments. She first elicited children’s narratives and then connected children’s holistic life experiences with the factors of children’s contexts and their learning environments. Although these researchers have different basic assumptions about children’s art and utilized different approaches in their investigations, they affirm that the interrelationship among learners, teachers, parents, and environments shape children’s art learning experiences.

Understanding parents’ perceptions of children’s early art experiences is an essential task for every art educator. Parents’ influence on their children is profound and lasting and directly and indirectly shapes their children’s values, attitudes, and behaviors. The interaction between parents and children can also impact children’s sense of being artistic, their perspectives of art, and their interest in art.

However, few studies in the art education field have directly discussed parental influences. Hsiao and Kuo (2013) and Hsiao and Pai (2014) conducted a series of quantitative
studies regarding kindergarten parents’ selection of out-of-school arts programs in Taiwan and their attitudes toward and beliefs about children making art. According to these studies, preschool parental beliefs regarding art education are predictive of children’s learning outcomes, and parents’ expectations of out-of-school art programs are for enrichment of children’s creativity, patience, and attention. However, one of the limitations of these studies, as the researchers indicated, is that more in-depth insight from parents is needed, such as intentions and purposes behind placing children in out-of-school art programs.

Some research shows that parent-child relationship issues and parents’ attitude might deeply influence a child’s development in middle childhood (Gavron, 2013) and children’s home literacy and numeracy practices correlate closely with their parent-child interactions and interest in exploration and art-related activities (Lukie et al., 2014). Furthermore, Chang and Cress (2014) contend that visual art can be a helpful medium for parent-child communication and young children’s oral language development because “visual arts serve as a referent for language and sustained conversations” (p. 421) when parents talk with young children about their visual artworks. In other words, parents’ encouragement of children learning art and art-related activities are significant issues related to children’s development.

Mindset for Conducting a Cross-Cultural Study

People who inhabit intercultural positions are increasing, and cultural groups are experiencing a collision of different norms and values (Boughton, 1999). These social changes affect contemporary awareness of research perspectives (Rogoff, 1998) and embrace postmodernist pluralism and cultural inclusion, challenging a single meta-narrative ideology (Efland, Freedman & Stuhr, 1996). The cultural environment significantly shapes the concepts of
individual development and ideology and thereby reflects implicit norms and social consensus. When conducting cross-cultural or intercultural studies, researchers come to a situation with certain expectations and attempt not only to articulate the uniqueness of each culture and its cultural differences but also seek to examine cross-cultural similarities (Hopp, Händel, Stoeger, Vialle & Ziegler, 2016). Moreover, researchers develop not only their subjective understanding of the chosen sites, but also develop intersubjective understanding (Nadaner, 1983). Most importantly, a cross-cultural or intercultural study helps explore the singularity of each culture, finds relationality, and opens conversations and possibilities.

When researchers are exposed to bicultural environments, they must avoid preconceptions about the context of each cultural setting. Because participant observers seek at once to participate as a member of a cultural group, they must be even more sensitive to the hidden stereotypes and bias among all stakeholders during the investigation (Green, 2014). In other words, researchers need to maintain a critical awareness when observing the ways in which participants perceive, make meaning of, and reproduce the interactions in the group over time (Green, 2014). Playing both insider and outsider roles in multiple research settings is inherently complicated and dynamic. Researchers not only have to critically explore researcher positionality within the groups but also intersect identities researchers bring to the research context (Green, 2014).

Parents in Taiwan and the United States

Researchers investigated parenting styles in the United States and determined six distinct patterns: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, traditional, indulgent, and indifferent (Baumrind, 1967, 1987; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). However, most research on parenting styles
and child socialization patterns has occurred in the United States, particularly in European American families (Heath, 2013). As Heath points out, the child socialization style and the children rearing approach in non-western and American ethnic minority families might not fit into the aforementioned classifications because of different cultural values and traditions. Heath further explains that compared to the individualistic cultural beliefs of the West, the parenting patterns in many non-Western societies, such as Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea, tend to reflect collectivist cultural beliefs.

However, Wang and Tamis-LeModna (2003) argue that although Taiwan has frequently been characterized as a collectivist society, research shows that the dichotomy of cultural collectivism versus individualism does not sufficiently reflect child-rearing values in Taiwan and the United States. In Wang and Tamis-LeModna’s cross-cultural study regarding parents’ child-rearing values in Taiwan and the United States, mothers in each group mentioned a total of 31 different values, which fell into five categories: individuality, achievement, proper demeanor, decency, and connectedness. These findings indicate that US mothers mentioned individuality and connectedness significantly more than Taiwanese mothers. In contrast, achievement was mentioned by Taiwanese mothers the most. The categories of proper demeanor and decency showed similar results. The researchers also point out that obedience and humility were consistently considered the least important values for both groups, and this result challenges the stereotypical concept that Taiwanese culture tends to be collectivist oriented. They further conclude that mothers in the two societies embraced both individualist and collectivist values.

To increase understanding about the specificities and complexities of the two research populations from Taiwan and the USA., an in-depth description and analysis of the interviewees and the bounded system are necessary (Davenport & O’Connor, 2014). The perspective of case
studies not only offers insights into the research topic but also illuminates hidden meanings of the description. Furthermore, conducting a cross-cultural/intercultural study invites reflexivity that researchers not only learn and comprehend the contexts and nuances of the cultures when navigating dual-research sites simultaneously but also develop necessary communication skills. Also, researchers learn to be flexible and find a unique perspective for interpreting a certain phenomenon by embracing subjective and objective opinions. Most importantly, cross-cultural/intercultural study expands the researcher’s sensibility toward multi-cultural issues throughout the process of the investigation.

Personal Experiences Relate to this Study

As an art educator and a doctoral student who is Taiwanese and has lived in the US for an extended period of time, I have observed the different art teaching approaches and out-of-school program structures of both countries. Also, as an art director and a co-founder of Shepherd Kit, Inc., I have designed child-oriented board games and construction toys for years. To understand parents’ and children’s preferences, children’s developmental needs, and educational functions, my business partners and I held many out-of-school art programs for parents and their children. Through these parent-child art classes, I directly interacted with parents and observed parent-child dynamics and their interpersonal relationships. I found that parents’ attitudes and their decision-making can have a significant impact on children’s art learning experiences and opportunities. My previous work experiences inspired me to observe the population of parents and children from multiple angles, and the observation experiences further motivated me to initiate this study. The role of the parent tends to be ignored by art education researchers, and the low rate of parent/child-related and out-of-school art program-related research reflects this
Parents are the gatekeepers who select learning environments and learning objects for their children, such as an out-of-school art program. Especially for young children, parents’ choices for their children’s education can have lasting impact. Knowing parental perspectives toward early childhood art education and out-of-school art programs provides necessary information for art educators, not only when they develop appropriate curricula for a better art learning experience but also when they need to promote a convincing idea of learning art to the public.

**Researcher Role**

According to Behar (1996), a good researcher should not only act as a participant in the research site but also remind themselves to keep their eyes open. In Art Express, I have played the roles of both insider and outsider because I was the teaching assistant for this class for two years. Additionally, I consider myself as both an insider and an outsider in NTU’s Children’s Art Camp because I am familiar with the cultural context of this site. According to Chen (2007) and Bogdan and Biklen (2006), one of the advantages of insiders in a research project is that insiders share the thoughts, habits, and social norms and values of their participants. The experiences of being a teaching assistant for Art Express provided me a clear idea about the operation of the program. Being an alumna of NTNU gave me prior knowledge and contextual perspectives about the site. These are the advantages of being an insider of both sites. On the other hand, every new semester or year, Art Express and Children’s Art Camp have a new theme and are taught by new student-teachers, which also makes me an outsider. The dual roles of insider and outsider allowed me to analyze the participants from multiple perspectives and with
diverse approaches.

With the dual roles of insider and outsider, my assumptions and biases needed to be carefully examined. My assumptions mostly came from previous experiences, such as the way programs divide groups and the classroom distribution, the lesson arrangement, and class agenda. As far as the participants are concerned, I assumed the characteristics of the parents and their children this semester might be very similar to those of the parents and children encountered in previous years. These characteristics included the children’s disposition and behaviors as well as their parents’ attitudes toward their outcomes and the program. The advantages of these assumptions were that I could immediately catch up with the new theme and accurately record the dynamics in the classrooms. The potential disadvantages were that be I might misjudge a new occasion by using previous experiences.

Philosophical Foundations

In this cross-cultural dual-case study, parents’ perspectives of and experiences with placing their children in an out-of-school art program were investigated through the lens of reflective thought (Dewey, 1997) and ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The application of these two theories to this research is presented in Figure 1.
Parents’ perspectives toward art education consist of their overall experience, such as their at-home and in-school learning experiences beginning in childhood, the influences of parent peer-groups, the influences of their partner, and the influences of the parent-child dynamic. Building a perspective is an ongoing process, and every former and current experience connects, supports, negotiates, and even battles each other. At the beginning, parents construct a ground or basis for a belief that is “deliberately sought” and “its adequacy to support the belief examined” (Dewey, 1997, pp. 2-3). Furthermore, parents’ conscious, active, consistent, and careful consideration of their beliefs constitutes their reflective thought (Dewey, 1997). According to Dewey (1997), “Reflection involves not simply a sequence of ideas, but a consequence” (p. 2;
italic in original), and parents’ reflective thought further interconnects new ideas or experiences they have encountered, eventually forming a perspective. Parents’ perspectives are a complex integration. When analyzing why parents made a certain decision, such as placing their children in an out-of-school art program, researchers need to carefully peel away layers of the accumulation of parents’ reflections and further comprehensively examine the interconnection among all the elements.

Additionally, parents’ internal decision-making processes regarding early childhood art education cannot be separated from external factors, such as their cultural contexts. The interactions among parents and children, the partnerships between parents and teachers, the connections between parents within the community, and the influences of social/cultural systems on parents’ child-rearing behaviors are all interconnected (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These interconnected relationships directly and indirectly constitute parents’ perceptions of and experiences with placing their children in an out-of-school program. Therefore, the past and present influences within their environment are essential for this study.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) states that “the ecological environment is conceived as a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls” (p. 3). His ecological theory concentrates on the interaction between and interdependence of individuals with the environment, and he outlined five basic systems that constitute the ecological environment: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1989).

At the level of the microsystem, the setting is “a place where people can readily engage in face-to-face interaction” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22). In this study, the microsystem represents immediate direct influences, such as the home, and more distant environments, such
as the out-of-school programs, that involve interactions with one or more people. The mesosystem refers to “the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates” (p. 25). In other words, a mesosystem contains the connections between two or more Microsystems. For example, in this study, the mesosystem refers to parents’ peer groups and dynamics among parents, children, and teachers/program personnel.

The third system, the exosystem, is composed of links among social systems in which the individuals do not participate but that have a direct bearing on others who interact with them (Heath, 2013), such as parents’ network of friends, parents’ workplaces, and community structures. Aside from the above interpersonal social systems, mass media, social media, and social welfare services are included in the exosystem. In this study, an educational system is another significant component of the exosystem, such as educator licensure programs that cultivate art teachers’ educational philosophy and teaching strategies.

The next system, the macrosystem, involves “the customs, attitudes, ideologies, values, and the laws of the culture in which the developing person lives” (Smith & Hamon, 2012, p. 187), which refers to cultural patterns, political philosophies, educational policies, global/national economy, social conditions, social ideologies/norms, and social/cultural expectations. The outermost circle of the ecological system, the chronosystem, highlights “the effect of time on the various interacting systems that shape a person’s development” (Heath, 2013, p. 17). In other words, the chronosystem consists of sociohistorical conditions, patternning of environmental events, and transitions over the life course. Parents’ perspectives consist of not only the relation to an individual’s development but also the changes in their environment over time. This research investigated two sites: one from Taiwan and other in the United States, both of which have their own unique cultural customs, ideologies, and values.
The action of making the decision to place children in out-of-school art programs is not merely an accidental event; it is an inherently complicated dynamic that refers to the interrelationship between individuals’ reflective thoughts and the social-ecological system that encompasses them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1989; Dewey, 1997). Parents’ contexts are studied to demonstrate how the socioeconomic conditions – such as their previous educational experiences, cultural/family backgrounds, and community relationship – impact their perspectives. Additionally, the researcher further examined parents’ perspectives at close range to deeply analyze their educational philosophy, challenges to participation in the program and descriptions of the program and their children’s art productions. This study also explored how parents’ perspectives influence their intentions and purposes regarding making the decision to place their children in out-of-school art programs and how their perspectives and experiences impact their interpersonal dynamics within the programs. By investigating parents’ contexts and holistic experiences at each cultural site, this study found a specificity and relationality of two cultural sites and opened conversations and possibilities regarding the potential applications of art education.

Moreover, this research used four contextual aspects to focus on examining parents’ experiences of placing their children in an out-of-school art program: participants’ exosystem, mesosystem, microsystem, and reflective thought (see Table 1). Additionally, this research analyzed the interplay among the four aspects, the internal and external factors related to the participants’ decision-making, and provided possible applications for the art education field.
The first focus, the exosystem, refers to participants’ habitus. According to Bourdieu (1984), when individuals enter a field, they always have their habitus, which are attitudes and predispositions that trigger their judgments and perceptions within the field. Individuals acquire a primary habitus in the home or family, and their secondary habitus is developed through years of experience in schools (Nairz-Wirth & Feldmann, 2019). Moreover, individuals’ habitus are the combination of the amount of their capital, which includes economic capital, social capital, and the most relevant to the topic, cultural capital. Cultural capital shapes individuals’ perspective of the right cultural chords, how to behave, and what works in various settings and contexts as well as their taste in art. Additionally, cultural capital causes people to make value distinctions between different pieces of art. According to Nairz-Wirth and Feldmann (2019), teachers’

Table 1
Research Focus and Components

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research focus and components</th>
<th>Exosystem</th>
<th>Mesosystem</th>
<th>Microsystem</th>
<th>Reflective thought</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational attainment</td>
<td></td>
<td>Art-related experiences</td>
<td>Interactions with children</td>
<td>Educational philosophy</td>
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<td>Demographic information</td>
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<td>Peer groups</td>
<td>Interactions with teachers</td>
<td>Intentions, purposes, and decision-making</td>
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<td>Social networks</td>
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<td>Program dynamic</td>
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<td>Description of the program</td>
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<td>Work experiences</td>
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<td>Resource/challenges to participation</td>
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<td>Description of children’s art productions</td>
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cultural and social capital may be changed through teamwork and innovative teaching strategies as well as the acquisition of new technologies. In this research, I concentrated on four components of the participants’ exosystems: educational attainment, demographic information, social networks, and working experiences. Understanding participants’ context was the starting point of this study because the narratives of participants’ exosystems provide holistic, chronic, and multi-dimensions of individuals that allow a deeper delve into the influences of participants’ habitus.

The second focus, the mesosystem, had three sub-components: art-related experiences, peer groups, and program dynamic. The mesosystem highlights the interrelations among several settings in which participants engage. As far as the participants’ art-related experiences, I looked at their formal and informal art learning experiences, particularly the interactions among people related to the events. According to Dewey (2005), experience is continuous and is refined by the events and scenes of daily life, and an act is undertaken as a consciously natural manifestation when individuals perceive the relationship between doing and undergoing. Parents’ previous art-related experiences directly or indirectly affect their perspectives of the influences of art on their children and further impact their decision-making regarding placing their children in an out-of-school art program. Aside from the participants’ art-related experiences, their peer groups were another inseparable factor of their mesosystem. I focused on the peer groups they were currently close with or interacted with the most because the dynamics in peer groups can indicate the participants’ values and ideology. Furthermore, the program dynamic refers to the interrelationships among parents, children, teachers, and program personnel.

The third focus, the microsystem, described the immediate and direct interaction between parents and their children as well as between parents and teachers. The interaction between
parents and their children incorporated the parents’ responses to their children, parents’ support, and the resulting power dynamic. The parents’ support plays a significant role in enhancing children’s self-regulatory behaviors related to their cognitive awareness, task management, and learning motivation (Heath, 2013). Additionally, the partnerships between parents and teachers as well as the connection between parents and parents can inadvertently impact not only parents’ experiences of placing their children in an out-of-school art program but also their children’s learning experiences in the program. Therefore, the parents’ narratives of the interpersonal dynamic within a program provided a different scope to conceptualize the influence of ecological aspects on parents’ experiences.

Compared to the external factors, such as interpersonal relationships, the participants’ reflective thought was an integrated condition that reflected their values, beliefs, and knowledge. The parents’ educational philosophy referred to their overall expectation for their children’s development and performances as well as their attitudes, actions, and reactions toward their children. In addition, the parents’ educational philosophy consisted primarily of their experiences and was not always easy to understand (Campbell & Palm, 2004). Helping parents articulate their educational philosophy helped clarify the interrelationships between the participants’ experiences and their motivation. Moreover, the participants’ intentions and purposes involved parental decision-making. The parents’ intentions and purposes were a representation of their personal perspectives that generated an action of making a decision. In other words, the parents’ decision-making processes were intertwined with their lived experiences and integrated across their intentions and purposes. Through carefully analyzing the factors that influenced the parents’ decision-making, I could clarify and infer the participants’ intentions and purposes and further connect to their personal perspectives.
The participants’ descriptions of an out-of-school program embodied their previous experiences of placing their children in a program and the messages they receive from programs. A new encounter of participating in a program may come with challenges, and parents learn to seek and utilize resources (Cambell & Palm, 2004). The participants’ narratives of challenges to participation offered different angles to interpret their personal perspectives. Moreover, the children’s art productions included tangible and intangible results, such as their actual artworks, their attitudes, and their responses toward the art class and their art works. By looking at how the parents described their children’s art productions through the program, I obtained an in-depth concept of the interaction between the parents and their children regarding their children making art, the parents’ perceptions of art education, and its influence on their children.

**Problem Statement and Purpose Statement**

This research addresses the problem most eighth graders in the US do not believe they have a talent for art and very few students have access to out-of-school art learning opportunities before eighth grade, even though more than half of students make their own artwork at home (Cohen, 2016; NAEP, n.d.; Irwin, Zhang, Wang, Hein, Wang, Roberts, York, Barmer, Bullock Mann, Dilig, & Parker, 2021). Out-of-school art learning is an inextricable part of children’s art experiences, and early parental support for the arts is critical because parent-child attendance at arts activities predicts children’s persistence in making art (Foster & Marcus Jenkins, 2017; Martin et al., 2013). Moreover, community support and school partnerships with art education agencies and higher education institutions can also profoundly influence youth to continuously participate in arts activities and programs (Bodilly, Augustine, & Zakaras, 2008).

According to the data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP,
n.d.) regarding students’ opportunities to access and engage in visual arts both in and outside of school, 42% of eighth graders in the US report taking visual art classes and only 21% believe they have a talent for art. Additionally, only 13% of the students have taken out-of-school art classes. Furthermore, Cohen (2016) points out that 83% of American adults agree that out-of-school art learning in the community is vital to children. However, only half of them agree that their community offers adequate arts and cultural opportunities. Additionally, 56% of eighth graders reported they make artwork on their own when they are not in school (NAEP, n.d.) and 75% of parents reported they do arts and crafts with their children (Irwin et al., 2021). An explanation for these data might be that children have internal motivation to do art and there is a demand for art activities. According to the above reports, when children do not receive sufficient visual art classes in school, out-of-school art learning is an appropriate and accessible supplemental resource. Yet, the fact that very few of the students have taken out-of-school art classes is left unanswered.

Winsler, Gara, Alegrado, Castro, and Tavassolie (2020) point out that a family’s socioeconomic status – such as parents’ education, family social capital, and investment in the child – can significantly influence children’s art learning opportunities outside of school. Also, parents with higher income have a higher percentage of doing art-related activities, such as visiting museums, with their children (Irwin et al., 2021). As Martin et al. (2013) stress, parental support and parent-child art interaction seem to be more significant than school- and community-based factors that influence children’s learning outcomes. In other words, parents determine children’s out-of-school art learning opportunities might influence children’s art learning attitude in school and their confidence in making art. Children’s in-school and out-of-school art experiences are mutually influential and consist of various factors. Without investigations of
children’s out-of-school art experiences and parental influences, school art-related research, such as students’ art learning outcomes, might not present the whole picture.

In response to insufficient out-of-school art learning opportunities, the purpose of this study was to explore the contexts and perspectives of parents in Taiwan and the United States when they placed their children in an out-of-school art program. The parents’ intentions and actions are crucial factors that influence young children’s early art learning experiences and outcomes (Martin et al., 2013). A combined framework of the social-ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and reflective thought (Dewey, 1997) informed the research questions and supported the inquiry, analysis, and interpretation of the findings to be applied to community-based art education.

Significance of the Study

This study explored parents’ perspectives toward children’s out-of-school art learning experiences and shed light on four themes in art education. The first theme is the importance of parent education in the art education field. As Martin et al. (2013) state, parental support and parent-child interaction influence children’s learning experiences and seem to be more significant than school- and community-based factors. Additionally, parents’ attitudes toward art education determine young children’s art learning experiences, which might have a long-term influence on children during middle and high school. In other words, parents’ support and art interaction with children in the early developmental stage are crucial for building the foundation of individuals’ lifelong art experiences. To some extent, if art education is a garden, enhancing and improving parent education is like establishing a healthy and rich soil ecosystem for an individual’s art experiences (seeds) to germinate and grow successfully. This study lays bare the
issue of insufficient parent education in art education and points out parents’ educational philosophies and perspectives on art education. The findings provide art educators, art program personnel, and researchers with a potential guide and strategy when developing positive communication with parents. Moreover, this study offers support when advocating for the importance of parent education in the art education field.

The second significant argument of this study is that the domination of social/cultural capitals might have a long-term influence on art education for many generations to come. Parents’ mesosystem and exosystem constitute their social/cultural capitals, which directly shape their children’s social/cultural capitals through the parent-child microsystem. Aside from the direct influence on children’s art learning experiences and their social/cultural capitals, the manifestation of parental support in art education might escalate to an institutional level. Parents are critical stakeholders in education and can be a powerful force shaping educational policymaking. Namely, the greater the parental support for art education is, the more likely the education system and institutions would emphasize art education. In other words, the domination of social/cultural capitals is like the regional climate of a garden (art education), and the climate determines whether plants (individual’s art experiences) can thrive and reach their maturity. This study reveals a hidden issue regarding the dominant social/cultural capitals cycle that might gradually and irreversibly change art education’s positionality in society. For instance, schools might further marginalize art classes if there is no solid public support for art in the educational system. Furthermore, suppose individuals have less art experience in and out of school, they might have fewer concerns about the importance of art, and this might influence their support of their children’s art learning. Gradually, this marginalization of art education in and out of school might become a negative cycle and profoundly undermine the position of art education in
The third aspect of this study’s significance is providing a different angle for cross-cultural studies. Although research still supports the argument of collectivism (Taiwan) versus individualism (US) as a cultural factor that influences parenting styles (e.g., Newland, Chen, Coyl-Shepherd, Liang, Carr, Dykstra, & Gapp, 2013), the dichotomy of collectivism versus individualism might oversimplify the two cultures’ parenting philosophies (Wang & Tamis-LeMonda, 2003). The findings indicated that the US and Taiwanese participants valued similar educational philosophies but had different manifestations. Simply put, the US parents tended to emphasize children’s external-oriented behavioral functions, whereas the Taiwanese parents tended to focus more on children’s internal-oriented behavioral functions. This study offers a different lens for cross-cultural research when interpreting the cultural factors and influences on parenting approaches. Moreover, the findings provide multiple dimensions of parents’ perspectives toward art education that can be potential research foci for future cross-cultural investigations.

The last theme emphasizes out-of-school art learning as an inextricable component that constitutes individuals’ art learning at their early stages and can be a foundation for investigations of out-of-school art learning for middle/high school stages. Unlike in-school art curricula, out-of-school art curricula do not have formal structures but do have the ability to stretch the potential applications of art education. The informality and supplementation of art curricula make out-of-school art programs into a lab classroom. This research provides an understanding of the possible factors that constitute parents’ attitudes toward early childhood art education and decision-making when selecting out-of-school art programs. Additionally, early childhood art education researchers and educators will be able to effectively examine the
interconnection among parents, children, teachers, and curricula and inventively explore the innovative theories in the art education field. This research sheds light on the inextricable relationship between in-school and out-of-school art learning that can be an important resource and rationale for program administrators, staff, and educators to strive for opportunities and funding for art programs. Additionally, this research provides a practical example of the interactions among parents, children, and teachers as a microsystem in the overall ecological system of out-of-school art programs. This information can help supervisors from educator licensure programs give effective advice to and provide training for pre-service teachers. By effectively cooperating with out-of-school art programs, not only can pre-service teachers enhance their teaching experiences but the partnership between educator licensure programs and out-of-school art programs can also reinforce positive community relationships. Additionally, this study analyzes factors that influence children’s out-of-school art learning experiences, which can be important contextual information that supports investigations of middle and high school students’ out-of-school art learning experiences.

Research Question and Sub-Questions

The researcher sought to answer the following research question and sub-questions: What are the contexts and experiences of parents in Taiwan and the United States when placing their children in an out-of-school art program?

1. How do participants describe their personal perspectives and art program-related exosystems?
2. How do participants describe their art experience and art program-related mesosystems?
3. How do participants describe the microsystem at home and in an art program?
4. What reflective thought is described by parents who place their children in an out-of-school art program?
5. What macrosystems of the two research cases are revealed that influence participants’ perspectives of out-of-school art programs?

The first sub-question captured the participants’ exosystems, which include their educational attainment, demographic information, social networks, and working experiences. The second sub-question addressed the participants’ mesosystem that concentrates on their art-related experiences, their peer groups, and the art program dynamic. The third sub-question focused on the participants’ microsystem, which includes the interaction with children at home and the interaction with the teachers in the program. The fourth sub-question delved into the participants’ reflective thought, which involves the participants’ educational philosophy, their intentions/purposes/decision making, description of the program, resources/challenges related to participation, and description of children’s art productions. The last sub-question explored the factors and the traits of the macrosystem for both research sites that influence the participants’ perspective of out-of-school art program.

Limitations

This study focused on the parents’ perspectives toward out-of-school art programs from DeKalb, Illinois, US, and Taipei, Taiwan. The research objects did not include one-time art workshops offered by institutions such as museums and nonprofit organizations, nor did it include school art clubs or art classes in daycare centers. The major limitation of this research was not being able to have the same quantitative components for both sites to compare and
contrast. Both sites have unique demographics and hold different cultural values that might create different accessibility and data collection outcomes. For example, at the first research site, DeKalb County, the estimated population in 2019 was 104,896 (US Census Bureau, 2019a). Taipei, the capital city of Taiwan, had an estimated population of 2,642,877 in 2020 (Taipei City Government, 2020a). There is only one out-of-school art program in DeKalb, Art Express, which is affiliated to the Northern Illinois University (NIU) Community School of the Arts. In Taipei, there are 112 out-of-school art programs as of 2021, including 110 independent/private entities and two are affiliated to different universities.

As far as the attributes of out-of-school art programs, Art Express is a Saturday school art program offered by the NIU Community School of the Arts. Art Express is a non-profit program that serves the community while providing a clinical opportunity for pre-service art teacher to practice various teaching approaches. However, there was no equivalent out-of-school art program in Taiwan, so two out-of-school art programs in Taiwan were selected as being the closest to the NIU’s Art Express: the Little Master Art Program at National Taiwan Normal University (NTNU) and the Children’s Art Camp at the National Taipei University of Education (NTUE). I had full permission to conduct research at NIU and permission with restriction to do research at NTUE. My research plan at NTNU was rejected due to privacy issues.

To fulfill the goal of conducting cross-cultural research, the two research sites had to have sufficient and similar numbers of participants. However, due to the restrictions for conducting research at NTUE, I was not able to interview enough participants from NTUE’s Children’s Art Camp. Alternatively, I recruited multiple clusters of participants who placed their children in several independent/private out-of-school art programs. Therefore, given the complex combination of participants, the analysis of the Taiwanese site does not parallel the US site.
Additionally, this research concentrated on the parents who had children in a certain age-range, so the research conclusions cannot be applied to children of different ages. As far as the limitation of data gathering and analysis, the research data came from interviews that reflected the participants’ then-current status and perspectives, which cannot predict their future perspectives. Moreover, each research site had its own unique cultural customs, values, and norms, which limited the possibility of generalizing the parents’ intentions, children’s outcomes from the program, and the environmental factors.

Definitions of Terms

The following definitions will be referred to throughout this study:

**Art production**: In this research, art production refers to the artifacts created by children in the out-of-school art program. Art production includes children’s final artworks, in-progress artworks, art portfolios, and any products that are made by children and relate to their creation process.

**Context of parents**: Parents’ context refers to their socioeconomic conditions that include their educational attainment, art-related experiences, and their demographic information. The first aspect, parents’ educational attainment, focuses on parents’ overall in-school educational history and out-of-school learning experiences, such as informal education and the experiences of attending out-of-school programs. The second aspect, parents’ art-related experiences, is a close-up of their overall in-school and out-of-school art learning experiences since childhood. The last aspect, the demographic information, includes the official demographic information of the region of each research site as well as parents’ narratives of their communities.

**Intentions and purposes**: In this study, parents’ intentions and purposes refer to a motivation and
a determination to make the decision to place their children in an out-of-school art program and select an out-of-school art program. Parents’ intentions and purposes are derived from their personal perspectives and further initiate an actual action of placing their children in out-of-school art programs.

**Interpersonal dynamic:** Interpersonal dynamic is an individual’s effective actions that forge relationships with others under certain circumstances. This study concentrated on direct interaction – such as parents interacting with their children, other parents, and teachers – and indirect interaction – such as the programs communicating with parents through social media, websites, emails, and advertisements.

**Out-of-school art program:** As the research site of this study, an out-of-school art program refers to a visual arts-oriented, community-based, and fee-based art program designed for children approximately from ages 4 to 12. The program should provide a sequence of classes instead of a one-time workshop. Also, the program should have clear learning objectives but does not require any formal learning assessment. The program can be affiliated with universities, schools, districts, or any institution. The program is distinguished from in-school formal art classes, and the curriculum is designed and taught by non-in-service art teachers, such as pre-service art teachers or art professionals. Additionally, the schedule of a program can be held during weekdays, after school, on the weekend, or during summer/winter break; school art clubs are not considered as out-of-school art programs in this research.

**Out-of-school art teacher/instructor:** Out-of-school art teacher refers to pre-service art teachers or art professionals. Pre-service art teachers are individuals who are currently enrolled in an art education program in a university and are training to be future art teachers. Art professionals are individuals who have an art background, such as artists, or have experience teaching art.
Parents and their children: In this study, parents are the primary research participants. The term refers to parents, grandparents, or guardians who place their children in out-of-school art programs. The term child refers to individuals ages four to eight who are currently participating or recently participated in out-of-school art programs.

Personal perspective: Parents’ personal perspectives are the core values based on parents’ holistic experiences and initiate their intentions and purpose of placing their children in out-of-school art programs. This study investigated aspects of parents’ educational philosophy, their descriptions of the program, and the challenges to participation. Parents’ educational philosophy refers to personal statement of a parent’s beliefs and guiding principles about their children’s education-related issues, such as the overall goals for their children, the priority of their children’s development, and the expectations of their children. Additionally, parents’ descriptions of the program refer to parents’ narratives of the out-of-school art programs. The last aspect, challenges to participation, refers to the issues, situations, and difficulties parents face when placing their children in out-of-school art programs.

Conclusion

Children’s in-school and out-of-school art learning is inextricable and provides different enrichment opportunities that constitute and transform their art learning experiences and their perspective toward art. For children who might not receive sufficient art classes in school, out-of-school art learning can play a critical role that continues and expands children’s art learning. However, although many students have motivation for or interest in doing art, very few have access to out-of-school art learning opportunities (Cohen, 2016; Irwin et al., 2021; NAEP, n.d.). Additionally, parents’ intentions and attitudes are crucial factors that influence young children’s
early art learning experiences, outcomes, and out-of-school art learning opportunities (Foster & Marcus Jenkins, 2017; Martin et al., 2013). This research applied the framework of the social-ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and reflective thought (Dewey, 1997) to explore the contexts and perspectives of parents in Taiwan and the United States when they place their children in an out-of-school art program. This research provides a different angle for art educators to examine parents’ attitudes toward children learning art, effective teaching strategies, communication approaches with parents, and community needs. Furthermore, this research sheds light on the significance of out-of-school art learning and parental influences that can be an essential justification for program administrators, staff, and educators to strive for opportunities and funding for art programs.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

This study looked at Taiwanese and American parents’ contexts, experiences, and perspectives of art when placing their children in an out-of-school art program. As the macrosystem of this topic, the social context directly and indirectly shapes parents’ perspectives on art and supports the presence of out-of-school art programs. The following literature review provides in-depth analysis of the macrosystem through three sections: historical perspectives on the value of art education, shift in early childhood art education, and art learning in out-of-school settings. The relationship of each section of the literature review is presented in Figure 2.

The outer circle represents how people have valued art education in the past and how those perspectives have directly and/or indirectly influenced the art education field, including early childhood art education. Different perspectives of children’s artistic development shape traditional and contemporary early childhood art education, which influences the content of out-of-school art programs and children’s art learning experiences. To delve into individuals’ art learning in out-of-school art settings, several dimensions should be addressed: essentials of out-of-school art programs, quality and evaluation of early childhood art programs, out-of-school art programs for boundary breaking, cultural capital and parents’ perspectives of out-of-school art programs, and family’s resourcefulness in regard to out-of-school art learning. An in-depth discussion of each section is presented as follows.
Figure 2: Relationship of each section of the literature review.

Historical Perspectives on the Value of Art Education

The purpose for and function of art education are directly related to human societies and cultures. Scholars and educators have tried to determine the value of art education by connecting the function of art with society (Efland, 1990; Eisner, 1982) as well as human development and experiences (Dewey, 2005; Eisner, 1982; Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1970). Generally speaking, the functions of art, the essence of art, and art as experience are the major realms that are usually
discussed by art scholars and educators.

**Functions of Art**

The perception that art has functions signifies the benefits and values produced through art education in societies. The artistic functions of an era are based on societal occurrences of that time. The history of art education is a part of human history, and different formations of art arise with the historical movement of time (Efland, 1990). There are two main domains of artistic function: one focuses on individual development and the other emphasizes the reflection of social needs. These domains are viewed as instruments that can bring advantages to humans and solve social problems. The function of art for individual development represents the concern of not only the physical and mental development of children but also their socialization.

Rancière (2009) defined aesthetics as acts of unconstrained open possibility that motivate individuals to discover themselves. Also, creating images as symbols performs the function of communication, and the role of art is to cultivate our imaginative abilities (Eisner, 2002). Similarly, Parsons (1987) claimed that art can play a meaningful and integral role in children’s development because art encourages thoughtfulness, reflection, and expression. Art is primarily a means of expression that helps children process their emotions and feelings, which in turn encourages the unfolding of their potential creative abilities (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1970). Furthermore, as an essential role in early childhood education, art helps children make a new and meaningful connection to society through diverse art-making experiences. One responsibility of education is the development of the individual’s sensibilities and spiritual well-being. In other words, art plays a meaningful role in children’s development since it can help children to cultivate the abilities needed in society – such as action, experience, redefinition and stability.
Children further develop problem-solving skills that can transfer to other domains of human activities (Efland, 1990; Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1970). In this regard, the task of art education in reflecting social needs is to sublimate children into socially useful channels.

A traditional art education approach only partially deals with contemporary society, which is shaped by mass media and the Internet. According to Freedman (2003), in postindustrial, advanced democracies, the visual arts have become fundamental to various social issues, including political discourses, social interaction, and cultural identity. Freedman further points out the “use of the term visual culture inherently provides context for the visual arts in its effects and points to the connections between popular and fine arts forms” (p. 1). Because visual culture is interdisciplinary and includes a wide range of visual production and communication, it engages viewers on multiple levels with their environment and experiences. Visual culture, therefore, provides a more flexible and critical angle for re-examining and coping with contemporary art education issues. Visual culture has become an appropriate approach to reform the education structure and connect students’ experiences with art as well as their identity formation (Freedman, 2003).

According to Siegesmund (1998), the major contribution of art education is to help students “learn to reason through perception” (p. 209) and further cultivate students’ capabilities “to analyze and construct individual meaning as they interact with the world” (p. 210). From the perspective of visual culture, helping students critically deconstruct social spectacles, such as the contained meanings from mass media and the internet, and reconstruct their own values to re-examine the given social spectacles are crucial in contemporary art education. Furthermore, “the effects of images shape an individual’s self-concept, even in the ways they shape the notion of individualism” (Freedman, 2003, p. 2). Through their interactions with surrounding visual
images, children inadvertently develop their self-identities by absorbing the information contained in images or proactively construct their own identities by decoding and analyzing images. Furthermore, children can utilize their visual power to create visual images for criticizing issues or claiming their own identities. Therefore, arts provide opportunities to achieve the aims of education regarding the production of an integrated person.

The function of reflection of social needs is to help people renew and grow their personal cultural identity and construct positive relationships within their own society through art education (Boughton, 1999). Some theorists (e.g., Efland, 1990, Stankiewicz, 2001) argue that art is not only a kind of personal expression but also a means for transforming individual life and society. Lowenfeld and Brittain (1970) contend that art education is an essential part of the educative process and benefits children’s abilities to live cooperatively in a society. Dewey (2005) saw school as a cooperative community that lives through group activities. In his view, learning in school settings should integrate classroom instruction with the children’s homes and neighborhoods instead of isolating them from the world of experience (Efland, 1990).

The service of individuals and social transformation is another perspective of art education. According to Boughton (1999), social change has been a major concern for educators from different cultures and countries, and social reconstructionists believe that art education should “serve as an active agent for social change” (Siegemund, 1998, p. 202). The reconstructionist stream refers to the general belief that art, culture and creative expression are powerful mediums that influence education and further transform individuals and society (Efland, 1990, Siegsmund, 1998). Social reconstructionists argue that multicultural art education can enable the narratives of diverse sociocultural groups to be heard (Efland, Freedman & Stuhr, 1996). Within the reconstructivist stream, art education is a powerful
analytical tool that can be applied in other disciplines; it also helps students achieve critical awareness and further encourages them to critically analyze social conditions and values (Siegesmund).

Another viewpoint of the purpose of art education is to tie art to economic reasons that art should be applicable to productive or industrial arts. For example, the aim of art education in America during the late 19th century to the early 20th century was to cultivate the skills related to workmanship to service industries (Stankiewicz, 2001). About 1880, American educators used the term manual training to refer to the industrial drawing, clay modeling, paper cutting, sewing, metalworking and woodworking that were taught in schools. Stankiewicz notes that the focus of the manual training was prevocational and functional-oriented rather than fine arts. To serve industrial needs, people from industry, business and government advocated that the function of art education is to develop human capital. These advocates for manual training believed that workers with better skills would be more productive and better appreciate quality workmanship and good design.

The British arts-and-crafts movement is another example of an art movement that influenced not only craft enterprises and schools’ courses but also societies and beyond. The British arts-and-crafts movement attempted to improve the quality of life of working individuals and to make culture available to everyone. The four principles of the movement were regard for the material, for the use, for construction, and for the tool (Efland, 1990). During the beginning of the 20th century, the movement was thriving in the United States not only because many prominent leaders of the movement came to the US to advocate the ideas, but also many Americans were inspired by the movement when they traveled to Britain. The arts-and-crafts movement influenced many professional art schools so that craft-related departments were
opened in the US and further influenced industry realms, such as enterprises of ceramic
decoration and magazine publication (Efland, 1990).

Another example is German Bauhaus that highlights creative problem-solving,
particularly in the field of applied arts (Efland, 1990; Eisner, 2002). The Bauhaus integrated the
theoretical and practical curriculum and attempted to unify training in art and design for
achieving the purpose of the collective work of arts (Efland). Although the Bauhaus’s enthusiasm
for disinterested objectivity, formalism, and abstraction may convey the image of rationalism and
denies human feeling and spirit, the pedagogical legacy of the Bauhaus lives on in public art
classrooms and has been the traditional core of professional art school curriculum (Efland;
Prager, 2014). After the Nazi regime closed the Bauhaus, many significant members of the
Bauhaus resettled in the United States. They brought their methods of teaching art and
transformed the visual arts in the US, such as arts, design, architecture, and crafts.

A similar example regarding promoting applied arts in schools can be found in Taiwan
during the late 19th century and the early 20th century. Taiwan was under Japanese rule between
1895 and 1945. According to the public school curriculum guideline in 1907, the purpose of art
education was to cultivate students’ sense of aesthetic and the skills of depicting objects; in 1912,
both craft and drawing became required courses in public school. According to Lin (2000), the
schools prioritized craft and applied-arts courses in the early 20th century in Taiwan due to
pragmatic-oriented needs from the society and the regional communities. Art education was also
viewed as a tool to serve political needs. During WWII, art guilds in Taiwan were required to
serve the Japanese government’s needs by making political propaganda (Wang, 2008). The
educational policies were changed accordingly, so the content of school art curriculum
encouraged students to support the Japanese government and the war (Wang).
Essence of Art

According to Pearson (2001), when discussing the nature of children’s drawing in contemporary theory, researchers and educators normally explain children’s drawing by three definitions: a natural part of human biology, a constructed part of human cultures or a combination of both, and most agree that it is a combination of both. Dissanayake (1974) argues that art is an irreplaceable and biological basic component in the evolution of humanity. She calls what artists do “mak[ing] special” (p. 47), which is like other universal human occupations, such as talking, working, playing, socializing, and loving. She further expounds this concept as “making the ordinary extra-ordinary” (Dissanayake 1995, p. 49) as well as “elaborating” (Dissanayake 2000, p. 7). In her subsequent publications (Dissanayake, 2014, 2017), she uses “artifying” to embrace the above terms. As Dissanayake (2017) defines,

artification and artifying refer to the behavior, observed in virtually all human individuals and societies, of intentionally making parts of the natural and manmade environment extraordinary or special by marking, shaping, and embellishing them beyond their ordinary natural or functional appearance. (p. 148)

Moreover, Dissanayake (2017) investigates the similarities between play and art in an evolutionary context and considers “art as a behavior (or behavioral predisposition), rather than an object (work of art) or quality (beauty, skill) or cognitive capacity for symbolization” (p. 147). In other words, art is the essence of humankind. This definition provides a foundation for art educators to claim that art is needed in the education system. For example, from an early childhood art educators’ standpoint, Shepard and Booth (2009) suggest that art is actually children’s first language because they think in images and express by symbols first.

Distinct from the argument that art is a behavioral predisposition, Eisner’s (1993), Goodman’s (1978), and Siegesmund’s (1998) elaborations on the essence of art focus on art as a
part of mind and epistemology that embraces sense, concept, and visual perception. Eisner’s epistemological viewpoint of art emphasizes the human sensory system. He believes that perception is a cognitive event and art creation employs individuals’ minds. Specifically, the arts refine our sensibility through sensory experiences that provide ways of knowing the multiple forms of representation. Additionally, Goodman (1978) claims the arts are products of cognition. In other words, how an individual comes to know about the symbol system is visual literacy, which is an essential element in epistemology. Moreover, Siegesmund (1998) suggests that “the soundest epistemological rationale for art is grounded in the philosophical arguments...that increase cognizance of sensory concepts to the end of developing skills in reasoned perception” (p. 212). He further stresses that art is beyond being a neutral instrument for creating social self-awareness and art is “a realm of feeling, sensory concepts, and exquisitely varied forms of human representation that give us insight into what it means to be in, relate to, and comprehend” (p. 212). Namely, the arts help individuals learn to reason through perception.

**Art as Experience**

“Experience occurs continuously because the interaction of live creatures and environing conditions is involved in the very process of living” (Dewey, 2005, p. 36). Dewey describes art is a process of doing and making with physical material. In his view, the aesthetic refers to the experience of appreciating, perceiving, and enjoying. Further, the basis of art is the aesthetic experience, which is present in every part of life.

To understand the aesthetic in its ultimate and approved forms, one must begin with it in the raw; in the events and scenes that hold the attentive eye and ear of man, arousing his interest and affording him enjoyment as he looks and listens: the sights that hold the crowd...The sources of art in human experience will be learned by him who sees how the tense grace of the ballplayer infects the onlooking crowd; who notes the delight of the
housewife in tending her plants...The intelligent mechanic engaged in his job, interested in doing well and finding satisfaction in his handiwork, caring for his materials and tools with genuine affection, is artistically engaged. (pp. 3-4)

In Dewey’s view, art is necessary for aesthetic, and aesthetic is sufficient for art. In other words, the broad nature of art includes fine and popular arts, low and high arts, connection to society, cultures, and everyday life experiences.

Because experience is the fulfillment of an organism in its struggles and achievements in a world of things, it is art in germ. Even in its rudimentary forms, it contains the promise of that delightful perception which is aesthetic experience. (pp. 18-19)

Rancière (2002) provides a similar perspective that aesthetic being true always implies that art is true, but aesthetic not being true does not always imply that art is not true. He further elaborates that aesthetic is a specific sensory experience. “We could reformulate this thought as follows: there exists a specific sensory experience—the aesthetic—that holds the promise of both a new world of art and a new life for individuals and the community” (p. 133). Siegesmund (2016) precisely interpreted Rancière’s philosophical perspective and pointed out the influence of this perception on art education in the United States:

Jacques Rancière philosophically positions art as a form of cultural activity...Rancière disjoins aesthetics from art. Art may contribute to aesthetics, but not all art is aesthetic. This separation challenges conceptions of the discipline of aesthetics as the arbiter of art, a common philosophical framework that drove primary and secondary school Art Education curriculum theory in the United States...Rancière challenges us to rethink aesthetics. Rather than aesthetics establishing the conditions of art, Rancière would suggest that art might contribute to the conditions of aesthetics. (pp. 61-62)

To understand individuals’ authentic experiences of art, one must begin with the visual spectacle of daily life. Art is not only the outcome of imagination; it operates imaginatively, which embodies human experiences. Hence, aesthetics and art cannot be separated because these are related to an experience, which is both active and passive and includes doing and undergoing (Dewey, 2005). Additionally, von Bonsdorff (2018) suggests the term “aesthetic agency” (p.
128) to elaborate on Dewey’s viewpoint: “The aesthetic mode of childhood is typically not one of either contemplative reception or creative production, but rather both a once, in sensuous activity. Aesthetic agency, then is co-creative, multimodal, and social” (p. 129). In von Bonsdorff’s view, aesthetic encompasses sensitivity, emotion, imagination, and thought. Because aesthetic agency combines receptive and productive activity, an individual’s aesthetic agency is social and intersubjective and involves the experiences of interacting with people and sensing the surroundings. Human experiences are simultaneously “shaped by culture, influenced by language, impacted by beliefs, affected by values, and moderated by the distinctive features of our individuality” (Eisner, 2002, p. 1). Central to growth, the experience is the medium of education, which is the process of learning to create ourselves (Eisner). We experience the empirical world by our biologically evolved sensory system and arts play the essential role in refining our sensory system (Eisner). The relationship between arts and experiences is inextricable. We perceive and make meaning of a new encounter based on the foundation of our current perceptions, which consist of our previous experiences, and art contributes to the development of complex and subtle forms of thinking that constitute our unique perceptions (Eisner). Every new experience compares with others and further layers up and eventually constructs a category of perceptions that is reflected in a certain time and place.

Aesthetic experiences of visual culture occur on multiple levels (Freedman, 2003). The characteristics of visual culture simultaneously illustrate the vital value of arts but also seduce individuals into adopting stereotypes. An individual’s aesthetic responses are closely connected to everyday image making and viewing (Freedman, 2003). According to Rancière (2002), the aesthetic regime of art, which structures the connections between artistic practices and life, can disrupt routines and dominant discourses and open various conversations. Moreover, the
aesthetic experience, “as a refiguration of the forms of visibility and intelligibility of artistic practice and reception” (Rancière, 2009, p. 5), grounds the autonomy of art and intervenes in the distribution of the sensible. Rancière (2009) writes:

The singularity of the aesthetic experience is the singularity of an as if. The aesthetic judgment acts as if the palace were not an object of possession and domination. The joiner acts as if he possessed the perspective. This as if is no illusion. It is a redistribution of the sensible, a redistribution of the parts supposedly played by the higher and the lower faculties, the higher and the lower classes. (p. 8)

In other words, aesthetic experiences intervene in the distribution of the sensible and open the possibility of new interpretations (Rancière, 2009). As Siegesmund (2016) states, Rancière’s philosophy provides a critical lens that helps art educators reexamine their current art education practice. Additionally, Siegesmund (2013) revisits debates between the views of art education and distinguishes three possible study approaches in visual art, including artistic education, art education, and aesthetic education.

The first is Artistic Education, defined here as the technical training of artists in the production of form. The second is Art Education, defined as teaching for formless sensory cognitive outcomes through art, that is, ways of empathetic thinking and being that emerge through engagement with art making. The third is Aesthetic Education, defined as the appreciation of inscriptions of meaning in a variety of cultural forms (p. 301).

Children’s art experiences in early childhood and elementary school should exceed the acquisition of disciplined and technical skills and further engage in visual thinking (Siegesmund, 2016). In this view, children’s art experiences should encompass art education and aesthetic education. For children, the arts are tools to foster their transformation of embracing lived social practice and gateways to experience their holistic lives. Most importantly, art experiences allow children’s inner processes to bloom and further reach their human potential.
Perspectives of Children’s Artistic Development

Studying child development allows us not only to understand the many changes that take place in children as they grow but to also fully appreciate the cognitive, aesthetic, emotional, physical, social, and educational growth children go through from birth to early adulthood. To explore the influences of developmental theories on out-of-school art programs, considering individuals’ various aspects of development as a whole not only aids in comprehension by analogy but also sparks distinct perspectives on the topic.

The following sections provide summaries of the psychological and sociological perspectives of children’s artistic development. Following this, I discuss an extended children’s artistic developmental theory-based model drawn from expert-novice models to represent the contemporary perspectives in learning theory, neuropsychological development theory, and early childhood art education theory. The last section focuses on potential applications of these models for out-of-school art program-related research.

Psychological Perspective of Child Artistic Development

Freedman (1997) categorizes the prevalent psychological perspectives of artistic development into two models: stage-by-age models and expert-novice models. The perspective of stage-by-age models leads to the assumption that child artistic development is a predictable “linear and unfolding process that naturally moves toward realism” (p. 97). The perspective of the expert-novice models challenges the concept that age is the determining factor in development and suggests the concept of development should move from a stage-dependent
conception of development to “a cognitive perspective of learning that depends on the integration of specific concepts” (p. 99). The following section provides an overview of the two psychological perspectives of artistic development models and a summary of the research that contributed to the perspectives.

**Stage-by-age models.** The core assumption of stage-by-age models is that children’s development depends on chronological age, and the concept of “the normal child” and “natural development” (Freedman, 1997, pp. 95, 97) are extremely important in the related studies. Stage-by-age models are rooted in modernism and are directly and indirectly supported by psychoanalysis, epistemology, individualism, and behaviorism, which are based heavily on analyses of the natural characteristics of growth. In relation to children’s artistic development, children’s drawing-related studies influenced by stage-by-age models tended to emphasize representational and formal qualities of productions that are sequential by age range (Freedman, 1997; Gardner, 1971)

Developmental theories provide a framework for thinking about human growth and learning. Some of the major theories of child development are known as grand developmental theories because they attempt to describe every aspect of development and often use a staged approach. Others are known as specific theories as they instead focus only on a particular aspect of development, such as cognitive, moral, and aesthetic development (DePoy & Gilson, 2012). No theory can be isolated from the others because one theory might be a modification of the original theory that integrated multiple concepts from different theories, or it might interconnect with and refer to multiple theories from different fields.

From the perspective of cognitive theory, development of individuals’ thought processes changes throughout childhood and influences how they understand and interact with the world
Piaget (1954) proposed one of the most influential theories of cognitive development that suggested children think differently than adults. His stages of cognitive development theory explain the development of thought processes and mental states.

Lowenfeld (1970) structured the first understanding of children’s artistic development through a stage theory, and Parsons (1987) contended the five stages of aesthetic development are drawn from philosophy, psychology, and educational theories. Both Lowenfeld’s and Parsons’s stage of aesthetic viewing development theories are based on traditional cognitive and psychological developmental theory, which refers to a linear pattern of stage-by-age model. Stage-by-age artistic development models strongly tie to children’s general development became a dominant discourse for the public to believe and follow, and it also helped establish psychobiological conceptions of child development (Freedman, 1997). In the art education field, stage-by-age artistic development models have been influential for decades, especially in relation to curriculum planning (Freedman, 1997). For example, the concept of stage-by-age artistic development models parallels information-processing models (Gagne, Yekovich & Yekovich, 1993) because the assumption of both concepts emphasizes a linear model and understates other variables, such as cultural, racial, and regional differences as well as the differences of socioeconomic status. Also, stage-by-age artistic development can be a strong justification for children’s art education because that concept of development directly refers to traditional developmental theories.

However, stage-by-age artistic development models tend to generalize the results from small and homogenous groups and allow group differences to become hierarchical in value (Freedman, 1997). Also, stage-by-age models are insufficient to deal with the diverse issues that
have been rising in the contemporary society, nor are the models able to explain the challenges and phenomena art educators have encountered in classrooms.

The most significant limitation of the stage-by-age models is that the concept of universal characteristics of human development has been challenged by the globalization phenomena, multicultural societies, and the development of new technologies. Linear stage-by-age models cannot explain the complexity of human behaviors and cognitive abilities, like an information-processing model cannot comprehensively represent how people deal with multiple sources of information simultaneously. Additionally, it only represents individuals’ external results and can only suggest their internal processes. As Pearson (2001) argues, art educators and researchers cannot actually see children’s holistic art-making experiences by only interpreting children’s artworks and not the art’s production. Another weakness of stage-by-age artistic development models is that it is not universally applicable, especially in non-western cultures. This model was developed in a particular time and circumstance, which implies that once the time and space changed, the assumption of the model would not be the same. For instance, Thompson (2005) argues that the universal stages of development in art can appear accurately “only for some children given certain experiences in particular contexts at specific historical moments” (p. 19). Moreover, individuals from different cultural backgrounds share different visual culture experiences, which also directly influences how they draw and how they represent the world they see through art.

**Expert-novice models.** The research on cognitive psychology provides the possibility of theorizing human’s internal psychological and cognitive processes, and it directly influences the rising of expert-novice models. The core assumption of expert-novice models is that age may not be the most important determining factor in development and the structure of domain specific
information can influence increasing formal knowledge (Freedman, 1997). Also, expert-novice model-related research suggests that any domain of knowledge has characteristics that are “inherently interdisciplinary” (Freedman, 1997, p. 99). Expert-novice models have roots in the research of cognitive psychology and are influenced by constructivist learning theories. Additionally, the concept of expert-novice models is socially constructed and based on professional communities (Freedman, 1997).

Learning is a complicated process that consists of sequential stages. Bandura’s (1969) social learning theory emphasizes modeling and vicarious learning focused on the learners’ internal experiences and behaviors as well as the mutual influences between action and thinking (see also Slavin, 1994). Bandura believed that behaviors could also be learned through observation and modeling. Children develop new skills and acquire new information by observing the actions of others, including parents and peers. Additionally, Piaget (1954) distinguished between assimilative processes and accommodative processes, which connects to the model of exert-novice. Specifically, assimilative processes indicate new experience is shaped to conform to existing knowledge structures, and accommodative processes represent the structures themselves change in response to new experience. Simply put, children are intelligent, socially active, and culturally contributing individuals (von Bonsdorff, 2018). Through parents’ and adults’ engagement, interacting with peers, and observing the environment, children make sense of their world, become familiar with social norms, and create their sense of self (von Bonsdorff, 2018). The model of expert-novice in art education can also be applied to children’s social-emotional development. Farrington’s and Shewfelt’s (2020) research on how art education supports children’s social-emotional development argues that social-emotional competencies depend on observing their environments, interacting with people, and making sense of their
experiences. They further stress the importance of close relationships with adults and peers because those relationships help children make meaning of their developmental experiences and expand their sense of themselves.

Sociological Perspective of Child Artistic Development

The sociological concept of development emphasizes sociocultural influences. Specifically, the society and the culture that individuals are exposed to can socialize individuals and influence their overall development. For example, children’s judgments about art can reflect the power dynamic among children and their parents and adult interventions (Gardner, 1990). Contemporary researchers on early childhood art education have revealed more diverse approaches to conceptualizing theories of child art. For example, Vygotsky’s (1978) social constructivist perspective emerged among early childhood art educators and let early childhood art educators recognize the importance of adults’ and peers’ roles in children’s art-learning experiences because learners in the early childhood years need “sensitive, responsive adults who support their development through visual art experiences” (McClure et al., 2017, p. 155).

Additionally, Pearson (2001) argued that children’s art should be viewed as a form of social practice and educators need to consider all the conditions for understanding child art. Sunday, McClure and Schulte (2014) contend that when investigating children’ art development, educators need to consider a wider context that encompasses children’s lives in the family, school, community, culture, and society because the contextual factors deeply shape children’s perception of art and their learning experiences.

Peer groups’ sociocultural influences also significantly shape children’s art learning experiences. Through a study regarding preschoolers’ meaning making when viewing
photographs, Rissanen (2017) notices that children not only support and entertain each other but also adapt to and negotiate each other’s views to create like-mindedness. Additionally, Rissanen points out that socio-cultural perspectives of art education stress the social processes in art creation and children’s culture is a significant aspect that influences their communication. In Rissanen’s view, children’s agency refers to “a special way of expressing oneself and influencing an ongoing action” (p. 5). Their agency is multidisciplinary, and the perspectives of seeing agency as children’s inherent capacity or as socially constructed are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Specifically, Rissanen believes that expressing oneself and influencing an ongoing action intertwines with interaction and dialogue with other people as a context-sensitive and dynamic process.

Web-Style Models-Related to Child Artistic Development Theories

The contemporary theories of development embrace diverse internal and external factors that can influence individuals’ art development. From contemporary perspectives on childhood, children’s life experiences and the process of how they make meanings are interconnected, and children are viewed as “active agents of cultural production” (Sunday, 2015, p. 232). In other words, contemporary perspectives consider a wider context that encompasses children’s lives in the family, school, community, culture, and society, and like a web, every spot is interconnected (Sunday, McClure & Schulte, 2014). Web-style models parallel a neural network model, which represents a complex, interconnected, multi-layers, and bidirectional model. Also, web-style models provide a way “to open up avenues of interconnectivity between domains that stood in isolation within the curriculum” (Efland, 2000, p. 277).

The complexity of web-style models solved the problem that stage-by-age models cannot,
such as seeing children’s artistic development as a multidimensional rather than a linear model. Simply put, instead of emphasizing linear progression in a knowledge domain, web-style models focus more on achieving a complex understanding through multiple revisits of the concepts (Efland, 1995). One of the biggest strengths of web-style models is the emphasis on the differences in individual development because individuals’ various forms of learning experiences “enable the learner to construct meaning by interconnecting otherwise widely separate bits of information” (Efland, 1995, p. 148). In other words, web-style models have the potential to expose children to a more significant number of overlapping and interconnected ideas and concepts (Efland, 1995). Therefore, children are more likely to transfer their experiences and ideas to a more diverse manifestation.

However, although a web-style model art curriculum can preserve the innate complexity of the learning materials, it might introduce too much complexity in the early stages of learning (Efland, 2000). Also, it is extremely difficult to customize a unique/personal art learning environment for every student in a school setting due to time and budget limitations. Moreover, art educators who utilize a web-style model of child development in their class are in an ambiguous position in that they need to be led and let go as well as intervene and observe. Another weakness of a web-style model of child development is that although it adopts some sociological developmental theories, such as Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory, it is still in the process of developing.

Potential Influences of Out-of-School Art Learning on Child Artistic Development

Students’ art learning experiences are a major interest among art educators and researchers. In-school and out-of-school arts learning provides different enrichment opportunities
that constitute and transform children’s art learning experiences and their perspective toward arts (Green & Kindseth, 2011; Shin & Kim, 2014). Out-of-school art programs are popular options that expose students to various forms of art learning beyond the formal art curriculum in school settings; however, there is no systematic investigation or theory that addresses the interrelationship among out-of-school art programs, children, teachers, parents, and communities, not to mention the influences of child art development on out-of-school art program settings. Most of the related studies focused on the curriculum and the structure of out-of-school art program, and only a few of them are concerned with children’s art development within the program (Betts, 2006; Mason & Chuang, 2001; Shepard & Booth, 2009; Washington, 2011). Additionally, while many studies have shown that quality out-of-school arts programs help students increase pro-social behaviors and self-esteem, reduce emotional and behavioral problems, and have a better adaptive functioning (Mason & Chuang, 2001; Wright et al., 2009), these studies are more likely to be group-specific, which does not reflect other groups of children’s development within the same settings.

Studies of out-of-school art programs can benefit artistic developmental models by providing a lab-classroom setting for art educators to explore the possibility of developing new or altering existing theories. An appropriate example is the Reggio Emilia approach, which was developed by psychologist Loris Malaguzzi and parents in the villages around Reggio Emilia, Italy after World War II b (McClure et al., 2017; Sunday, 2015; Thompson, 2005). It was not an official school curriculum, so it provided more space to let the educators and parents explore possibilities of a curriculum in any way. Out-of-school art programs have the advantage of not being as structured, and children in an out-of-school art program setting can perform more naturally than they do in a school setting. Observation of children’s performances within an out-
of-school setting might be able to reflect a more realistic situation of child art development.

**Traditional Early Childhood Art Education**

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, modernism gradually began to have an influence on the recognition and study of child art. It was at that time educators and researchers began to seriously consider whether children’s art has aesthetic qualities (Efland, 1990; Sunday, 2015). Efland’s (1990) analysis of the history of art education in the United States resulted in his categorization of three streams of influence: “the expressionist, reconstructionist, and scientific rationalist streams” (p. 260). The expressionist stream, grounded in nineteenth-century romantic idealism, “placed the artist in the vanguard of society” (p. 260). Best represented by the ideas of Viktor Lowenfeld and Herbert Read, the expressive streams utilize art as a means to express emotions and “the child artist was given the role of the savior of society” (p. 260). Efland describes the reconstructionist stream as “the general belief that education is a force that can transform society” (p. 261), while a reconstructivist views art and creative expression as a tool to enhance and influence educational outcomes and serve social transformation. Influenced by the discipline-oriented movement, scientific rationalists claimed that art education is a discipline with distinct methods, which gave art educators hope because art was warranted knowledge.

After World War II, children’s development became a central issue in art education, which highlighted the individuality and uniqueness of children artistic products (Efland, 1990). According to Efland, a series of post-World War II art movements significantly influenced the art education field. The expressive stream was the dominant discourse in the field of art education between 1945 and 1960, as represented by Lowenfeld’s and Read’s ideas. The expressive stream discarded artistic traditions and social constraints and expanded possibilities for personal
expression (Efland, 1990). “The child as artist became wedded to the artist’s struggle to achieve expressive freedom” (p. 260) because the child artist was given “the role of the savior of society” (p. 261). One of the important contributions in the expressive steam was Lowenfeld’s (1970) Creative and Mental Growth, which addresses the idea that developing the creative potential of individuals can help children grow and adjust to social change (see also Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1970; Stankiewicz, 2001). Lowenfeld provided the first understanding of children’s artistic development through a stage theory. He suggested that previous stages constitute the formations for later stages and that there is a linear pattern through various stages of artistic development (Sunday, 2015). By making art, children can not only build their sense of ego but also make connections with their surroundings (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1970).

Another significant contribution to artistic development theory is the stages of aesthetic development (Parsons, 1987) and children’s drawing development (Gardner, 1980). Parsons’s (1987) book, How We Understand Art: A Cognitive Developmental Account of Aesthetic Experience, draws the five stages of aesthetic development from philosophy, psychology, and educational theories. Each stage advances the previous one and suggests children in later stages can make better sense of works of art. At stage one, children respond with delight to images because of the subjective associations the images stimulate; at stage two, the idea of the subject matter has become dominant, and realistic representations and attractive objects are the primary considerations for making a judgment. The second stage is advanced over stage one because it is objective rather than dominated by personal favorites. At stage three, the dominant idea is now expressiveness, and what is expressed in the images is more important than being realistic or beautiful. Stage three represents an advance over stage two because children are aware of the subjectivity of the aesthetic experience. Stage four deals with an in-depth understanding of style
and form and highlights art as a social metaphor rather than a personal achievement. In this stage, children realize their interpretation might be inadequate and need to be improved by considering other people’s viewpoints. Stage five indicates the characteristic of autonomy and refers to the values and significant concepts of a scholarly tradition. In this stage, children see art as raising questions rather than transmitting established views.

In his book, *Artful Scribbles: Significance of Children’s Drawing*, Gardner (1980) attempts to put the facts of artistic development into the context of the general development of children’s symbolic skills. According to Gardner’s observation of his children’s behaviors, toddlers scribble on paper in a way that appears natural and unlearned. When they become preschool age, they gradually learn representational drawing and develop schematic tadpole figures. Gardner considers the early school-age the flourishing period of the central enigma of artistic development. He also parallels this period with the development of linguistic and symbolic abilities. Furthermore, he noticed that children’s creative burst disappears in a few short years and is replaced by concerns for realistic representation. He points out that children who start mastering other symbolic forms of expression during late childhood might contribute to this change.

Developmental theories became a dominant discourse for decades and have been the basis of curricular design and instructional practice in early childhood art education since that time (Thompson, 2003, 2005). However, the concept of universal stages of development in art cannot fully explain children’s holistic art experiences, the nature of children’s art, or their cultural differences (Gardner, 2017; Thompson, 2005). Also, these child art theories do not acknowledge the distinction between the artifactual residues (results) and the practice (processes) (Pearson, 2001). Thus, this traditional perspective of early childhood art has been reconsidered.
and is now being challenged by scholars.

**Contemporary Early Childhood Art Education**

Research on child development, artistic development, and family provide insight into art education practices and institutions with regard to the kinds of art learning that should be implemented during early childhood. Learning, including art learning, is a complicated mechanism that involves psychology, sociology, biological, neurophysiological, cultural, anthropology, and beyond (Jarvis, 2009; Wenger, 2009). Contemporary research on early childhood art education is based on multiple theories, such as sociological theories of learning, to enrich rationales and approaches to art teaching (McClure, Tarr, Thompson & Eckhoff, 2017). One of the core concepts of the sociological perspective regarding learning is that individuals’ experiences and the context in which they exist are inextricable, and individuals experience the process of becoming through everyday interactions with people, the environment, social ideology, values, and every visible and invisible feature they might encounter.

Contemporary researchers on early childhood art education have revealed diverse approaches to conceptualizing theories of child art. Pearson (2001) argues that children’s art should be viewed as a form of social practice, and as a result, educators need to consider the social conditions for understanding child art. One concern is that “the entire body of literature about children’s drawing consists of cumulative strands of the possible ways child art can be used for constructing knowledge” (p. 349). In other words, children’s artwork presents a seductive archaeological object that is easily utilized for interpreting human development, and rather than challenging and rejecting previous, unsupported theory based on new evidence, researchers have simply added to the body of theory as if all possible theories are scientifically
correct. Moreover, Pearson points out that art educators and researchers cannot actually see children’s holistic art-making experiences by interpreting only the children’s artwork and not the processes of children’s artistic production. The reasons that motivate children to engage in doing art might be connected with their drawing products, but no one can infer the whole process of drawing and the whole context of the actions based on the drawing products.

Researchers (e.g., Eisner, 2002; Sunday, 2015; Thompson, 2003, 2005) indicate that many existing investigations of child art are limited to investigation of the formal characteristics of children’s drawing and assume that individuals’ artistic development is an automatic consequence of maturation. Analysis of results from those studies overlooks the fact the universal stages of development in art can appear accurate “only for some children given certain experiences in particular contexts at specific historical moments” (Thompson, 2005, p. 19). According to Thompson (2003), a conscientious search through children’s drawings from Saturday art classes over 12 years reveals that the typical characteristics of children’s drawing representing Lowenfeld’s theory are extremely hard to find. Also, the perspective of developmental science provides limited insight into the visual form of representation and cannot illustrate “what it means to be artistic” (Siegesmund, 1998, p. 211). Moreover, Sunday (2015) suggests that “a more inclusive theory beyond a developmental paradigm” (p. 232) is needed in early childhood art education. Gardner (2017) recently re-examined developmental psychology perspectives related to child art theories. In his article “Reflections on Artful Scribbles: The Significance of Children’s Drawings,” Gardner argues that although much of development turns out to be smooth, progressive and regressive facets can still be found in children’ development. Considering this, he altered his previous emphases regarding the universal stages of development initiated by Jean Piaget and states that “while a convenient expositional term, ‘stages’ may be too
Contemporary perspectives on early childhood education and art education in the US have been inspired by the work of educators in Reggio Emilia in northern Italy, which utilizes a world-renowned and excellent system of early childhood education developed following World War II (McClure et al., 2017; Thompson, 2005). In the pre-schools, they highly value children’s voices as well as the dynamics among children, teachers, families and the ecological systems in the community (McClure et al., 2017; Sunday, 2015; Thompson, 2005). According to Trafí-Prats, (2015), “Learning in Reggio Emilia schools allows for the unfolding of multiple engagements, derivations, and reconstructions of the idea that children often negotiate through sensorimotor and graphics languages” (p. 41). Contemporary perspectives on early art education in the US parallel the sociological perspective of learning in that the internal psychological process and the external interaction process should both be considered when investigating children’s learning (McClure et al., 2017; Sunday, 2015; Thompson, 2005). As well as emphasizing sociocultural influences, such as children’s societal and cultural contexts, attention should be paid to the ways these contexts socialize children and to their experiences as they socialize with each other.

Based in the contemporary perspectives of childhood, children’s life experiences and the ways they make meaning are interconnected, and children are viewed as “active agents of cultural production” (Sunday, 2015, p. 232). In other words, contemporary researchers consider a wider context that encompasses children’s lives in the family, school, community, culture, and society and provide children with environments involving both consistent and contradictory information that influence their art experiences in making meaning (Sunday, McClure & Schulte, 2014). In contrast to research only focusing on art products, research that increases the opportunity for children to speak about their art is of value. The study of art practices should
“value and rely on collaboration, participation and interaction” (Sunday, 2015, p. 232). Looking at children’s art experiences we should not only consider representation of their active thoughts but also the surrounding elements with which children interact. As Thompson (2005) suggests, art researchers and educators need to learn about the children in their context and consciously question the developmental assumptions that “permeate our thinking about children and their art” (p. 20). Most importantly, children should be seen as proactive individuals who “continuously negotiate a multiplicity of messages, interpreting, integrating, and performing those messages within their own contexts” (Sunday, McClure & Schulte, 2014, p. 2).

Children should be viewed as active creators instead of passive recipients of knowledge (Sunday, 2015) because their creation involves “recognition of multiple solutions, selection of a path of action, and justification for the selection” (Siegesmund, 2002, p. 26). Those viewpoints are also addressed by the National Art Education Association’s (NAEA) Early Childhood Art Education (ECAE) issues group. The position paper, “Art: Essential for Early Learning,” focuses on the central role of art experiences among young children, educators, environments and materials (ECAE, 2016). The ECAE position statement paper describes strategies to help early childhood art educators comprehend the mission of the ECAE and provides eight principles that highlight the dynamic context of art experiences in the lives of young children (McClure et al., 2017). The eight underlying principles of early childhood art education are as follows:

1. A child needs an organized materials-rich environment that invites discovery, interaction, sensory and kinesthetic exploration, wonder, inquiry, and imagination.
2. A child needs access to a wide variety of art media that support two- and three-dimensional expression.
3. A child needs plenty of unhurried time, both structured and unstructured, to explore
the sensory/kinesthetic properties of materials and to develop skills and concepts in re-presenting his or her experiences.

4. A child needs a responsive educator who values young children’s diverse abilities, interests, questions, ideas, and cultural experiences, including popular culture.

5. A child needs a responsive educator who can support appropriate development of skills, use, and care of materials.

6. A child needs a responsive educator who understands and supports the unique ways young children represent their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions through actual, virtual, and experimental media and processes.

7. A child needs a responsive educator who supports the multiple ways young children create meaning through conversation, storytelling, sensory-kinesthetic exploration, play, dramatics, song, and artmaking.

8. A child needs a responsive educator who carefully observes, listens to, and reflects on children’s learning using multiple forms of documentation and assessment.

The ECAE authors advocated for the idea of quality art experiences for young children, which refers to a diversity of environments in which “young children play, experience the arts and construct new knowledge and experiences” (McClure et al., 2017, p. 161). In this view, providing supportive arts-rich environments for young children is beyond educational responsibility; it is an “ethical necessity” (p. 161) for all children. Hence, four common aspects emerged from the above referenced literature: curriculum, environment, educator, and child. These four aspects are interconnected and are the major themes for early childhood art education-related research.

In sum, the sociological perspective of early childhood art education emphasizes the
social processes in making art and considers children’s cultural context, cultural capital, and communication among peers are inextricable. In other words, children’s art creation is a form of social practice influenced and constructed by their art experiences, family dynamics, interpersonal relationships with teachers and peers, and the learning environment. The sociological view of art education provides a different angle to elucidate children’s artistic development. However, the practical aspect of the sociological perspective of art education, such as curriculum, teaching methods, and assessment, still requires more in-depth investigations.

Art Learning in Out-of-school Settings

Investigating the topic relates to art learning in out-of-school settings requires multi-angle discussions to capture the diverse nuances of participants’ experiences. The following section presents four themes that analyze the different dimensions of art learning in an out-of-school program. The first theme is the essentials of out-of-school art programs, which support the importance and uniqueness out-of-school art programs have. The second theme delves into the quality and evaluation of early childhood art programs that provide an application of the first theme. The third theme unitizes Bourdieu’s (1984) theory to explore the internal and external factors that influence parents’ perspectives of out-of-school programs. The last theme discusses how family’s resourcefulness influence children’s out-of-school art learning.

Essentials of Out-of-School Art Programs

Dewey (2005) emphasized the importance of creating communities for learners in which children learn from each other and anchor art learning in their daily life experiences. In this view, art learning does not exclusively happen in school settings; various kinds of informal art learning
opportunities, such as art activities at home and out-of-school art programs, have contributed significant aspects to children’s overall art learning experiences.

As Eisner (2002) states, various forms of public education are crucial and do not refer to just formal school education. It includes “education of the public outside of schools, parents and members of the community” (p. 175). Home-based care and community-based art centers and programs offer a significant influence on young children, and these institutions should be equally emphasized by early childhood art educators (McClure et al., 2017). Compared to formal or in-school art-learning, informal art-learning, such as out-of-school art programs, transforms students’ identities and nurtures their enthusiasm for art-learning in different ways (Green & Kindseth, 2011). One of the advantages of learning in out-of-school art program settings is that out-of-school art programs value the process of art-learning and emphasize the intangible results of students, such as self-esteem, personal interests of art, and the relationships among family, peers and community (Betts, 2006; Green & Kindseth, 2015; Wright et al., 2009). For example, researchers (e.g., Gacherieu, 2004; Shepard & Booth, 2009; Wright et al., 2009) found that out-of-school art programs can increase prosocial behaviors and self-esteem as well as development of social and artistic skills (Wright et al., 2006). Another claim is that out-of-school art programs can help students learn other disciplines and improve their learning attitudes, as shown in Gacherieu’s (2004) study. In this research, Gacherieu found that art-learning is conducive to increasing students’ academic performance and their positive attitudes toward school and communities.

Community engagement is another focus of out-of-school art programs because they are excellent venues for building partnerships with local communities and often have productive and well-established relationships with coalitions of community organizations (Afterschool Alliance,
2015; Washington, 2011; Wright, John & Sheel, 2007; Wright et al., 2009). Washington (2011) found that a community-based art program embodies art education’s contributions to social change and enhances new community engagements, which is an effective way to address community problems or concerns. By including parents in the programs and integrating family strengthening efforts, out-of-school art programs not only help children and families build a strong sense of community and trust but also help communities discover social issues and further benefit to community development (Washington, 2011; Wright, John & Sheel, 2007; Wright et al., 2009)

Furthermore, from the standpoint of college educator licensure programs, out-of-school art programs serve as a “real-world teaching lab” (Lampert, 2007, p. 265), providing opportunities for pre-service teachers to enhance their teaching experiences and further reinforce partnerships between educator licensure programs and out-of-school art programs. Additionally, art educators become more effective leaders or valuable members in communities by participating in out-of-school art programs (Betts, 2006; Washington, 2011). In this regard, out-of-school art programs have been an important venue for art educators to practice innovative curricula and to investigate children’s art learning experiences. Out-of-school art programs can stretch the potential of art education, and the informality and supplementation of art curricula make out-of-school art programs into a lab-classroom.

According to Siegesmund (2013), “Daring and risk-taking are methods for inquiry in the visual arts that can take the form of doing and pausing” (p. 306). As a democratic practice, visual art curricula encourage students to challenge dominant discourses and break boundaries. As Siegesmund (2013) suggests, “Art can restrict or open dialogue and possibility. Art education curricula cannot be held to preordained designs; they need to risk” (p. 307). Conducting art
education research should break boundaries, take risks, and create spaces where various
dialogues and possibility can be freely presented. Out-of-school art programs, in a way, can be
seen as “minoritarian” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 45). A position on the fringe or at the
borderline that studies of out-of-school art program can open up a space for becoming or even
break the boundaries of what we think of art in life.

Quality and Evaluation of Early Childhood Art Programs

Undoubtedly, the quality of an out-of-school art program influences children’s learning
experiences, which is a crucial criterion for parents when they select a program. The following
section introduces the general structure of an art program and provides some cases regarding the
factors that influence the effectiveness of a program. Following this, I discuss the evidence that
indicate the quality of early childhood art programs.

Art Programs’ Aims, Goals, Objectives, and Criteria

Effective classroom assessment is an integral component of quality teaching that
determines the effectiveness and utility of learning (Beattie, 1997; Boughton, 2004). Early
childhood art programs, like art curricula in school, require program evaluations and curriculum
assessments to define a program’s strengths, weaknesses, effectiveness, and opportunities that
help programs become sustainable.

The level of aims refers to societal focus, such as social values toward early childhood art
education, what art education contributes to child development, and how this culture and society
value child learning. The level of goals indicates institutional focus and concerns what
knowledge and purposes early childhood art education programs attempt to promote to fulfill the
above aims, such as how to create enrich and safe learning environments for children to freely explore the world of art and benefit their development. The objectives level refers to student focus, which emphasizes what children do to fulfill the above goals. The elements of a program also influence the curriculum structures of early childhood art programs. It leads to how educators and administrators define the characteristics of the curriculum; how they invite parents, families, and communities to get involved; and what learning models and philosophies they utilize to apply to the curriculum.

As Boughton (2004) suggests, assessment criteria are integral to the program that can define expected performances of children’s learning on the strengths of the teaching strategy. In relation to early childhood out-of-school art program evaluation, developing criteria can help educators, administrators, and evaluators determine the quality and outcomes of the program. For example, the possible criteria for evaluating the aspect of “curriculum” (includes time, learning environment, and art forms) can be plenty of unhurried time (time), organized and materials-rich environment (learning environment), and a wide variety of art media (art forms). The possible criteria for evaluating the educator factor (includes educators’ attitudes and teaching strategies) can be attitudes of valuing young children’s diverse abilities, interests, questions, ideas, and cultural experiences (educators’ attitudes), and strategies of supporting young children to create meaning through conversation, storytelling, sensory-kinesthetic exploration, play, dramatics, song, and art-making (teaching strategies).

Based on the given criteria, early childhood art programs can develop their own unique characteristic by cooperating and utilizing institutional resources and community resources. Evaluators can compare programs, develop rubrics, and determine benchmarks for educators and administrators. Furthermore, through program evaluation, educators and administrators can
reexamine the structure of the program and alter the content to fit children’s and communities’ needs.

**Evaluating the Effectiveness of a Program**

According to Moos and Trickett’s (1987) classroom environment scale (CES), which is an evaluation method that focuses on children’s perceptions toward teaching and learning environment, there are 90 items and three dimensions: relationship, personal growth/goal orientation, system maintenance and change. The first dimension, relationship, indicates the degree of children’s attentiveness, participation, friendship among peers, and teachers’ support. The second dimension, personal growth/goal orientation, measures the task orientation in the classroom and the competitive behavior among children. The third dimension, system maintenance and change, measures the organization of classroom activities, the establishment of clear rules, and teachers’ classroom management. These scales link specifically to educators’ attitudes and teaching strategies refer to teachers’ support and teachers’ classroom management. The learning environment refers to the organization of classroom activities.

In addition, MacLeod, Sharp, Weaving, Smith, and Wheater (2014) reported an evaluation of the Start Program, which is a program founded by the Prince’s Foundation for Children & Arts and established specifically to provide disadvantaged children with opportunities to access high-quality arts activities. In this report, the researchers identified some key success factors that influenced the effectiveness of the program, such as child engagement, teacher professionalism, parental involvement, and community partnership. Specifically, child engagement refers to children’ overall art learning experiences. Educators’ attitudes and teaching strategies connect to teacher professionalism, which concerns how teachers implement their
teaching philosophy and teaching strategies. Parent-child interaction and parental involvement represent parents’ roles in the programs, and community resources and atmosphere link to community partnership, which refers to how the program collaborates with communities. Although no factor directly refers to it, cultural activities are always a central content throughout the Start Program.

Evidence of the Quality of Early Childhood Art Programs

Two aspects of evidence indicate the quality of early childhood art programs. The first is quantitative evidence, such as a survey, enrollment number, and customer revival rate. The second is qualitative evidence, such as children’s art productions, parents’ feedback, and comments through interviews.

A quantitative approach was used in Yazıcı’s (2017) research to assess the comprehensibility and relevance of the activities to determine the quality of the program. A quantitative method can be applied to early childhood art programs, such as a survey of the satisfaction of the curriculum and data on the student enrollment and customer revival rate. Additionally, the click through rate (CTR) and sharing rate on the website and social media can also be considered as evidence of defining the quality of the program.

MacLeod et al. (2014) evaluated the program through the interview data gathered from the participants. This method can also be used to investigate the quality of an early childhood art program. Specifically, the first qualitative evidence is from children’s art production, including their art learning experiences and artwork. To gather evidence about children’s art learning experiences, classroom observation and interviewing children are appropriate methods because the integration of the narratives can be triangulated to see the whole picture of the learning
process. For assessing children’s artwork, art critique and portfolio are possible strategies to determine the outcomes of children’s art learning. Also, analytic assessment is recommended because it describes the various degrees to which a quality may be present in children’s artwork and portfolios (Boughton, 2012). A second qualitative evidence is from parents’ feedback. The interviews can elicit parents’ satisfaction, which is a reflection of how parents feel about interacting with the program.

**Cultural Capital and Parents’ Perspectives of Out-of-School Art Programs**

According to Bourdieu (1984), cultural capital shapes individuals’ perspective of how to behave and what works in various settings and contexts. Additionally, cultural capital causes people to make value distinctions between different arts. Parents’ decisions about placing their children in an out-of-school art program are influenced by their inherent cultural capital. In other words, parents might think children learning art is valuable because it helps children be creative and have experiences or simply because they need to fill their children’s schedule.

Bourdieu (1984) contended that a cultural capital code is not simply rationalized by the innate virtue of an object but by the structures in which we were born and raised. Parents’ taste in art, or specifically their perception of early childhood art education, is predisposed by their upbringing and their education, which is influenced by their social origins and class. Society is a multi-dimensional space consisting of a number of sub fields, such as school, social network, and workplace. Each field has its own rules and doxa, which implies common beliefs and opinions within the field. As a field, an out-of-school art program has characteristics (e.g., curriculum, teachers, and classroom environment) that might be possible reasons parents enroll their children.
Children’s art learning cannot be separated from external factors, such as their cultural contexts. The interactions among parents and children, the partnerships between parents and teachers, the connections between families within the community, and the influences of social/cultural systems on parenting and personal behaviors are all interconnected (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These interconnected relationships directly and indirectly constitute children’s art learning experiences. Bronfenbrenner (1979) states that “the ecological environment is conceived as a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls” (p. 3). His ecological theory concentrates on the interaction between and interdependence of individuals with the environment, and he outlined five basic systems that constitute the ecological environment: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem and the chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1989).

Children engage in artistic creations and articulate their aesthetic choices, which require complex and various kinds of abilities that involve their development of emotions, cognitions, and physical abilities (Gardner, 1990; Jensen, 2001, Szechter & Liben, 2007). Parental support is relevant to many aspects of child development and profoundly influences individual variations (Mermelshtine, 2017). Parent-child interaction plays a unique role in child development because it inextricably intertwines with individuals’ sensitive period of rapid cognitive development stages and environments (Obradović, Finch, Yousafzai & Rasheed, 2016). Acceding to Qiu (2009), positive parent-child interactions can benefit parent-child relationships when parents and children collaboratively do tasks by helping children regard their parents as reliable partners and mentors. Children will be more willing to open their minds and express their emotions and opinions. Parents’ active roles in their children’s development can help expand children’s potential learning capabilities and optimize their learning to gradually achieve the learning
independence (Eisner, 2002).

The following section reviews 14 studies from the past decade through three themes: 1) parent-child interaction and child developmental outcomes, 2) parent-child interaction and parents’ characteristic-related factors, and 3) parent-child interaction in cross-cultural contexts. I also examine the application of out-of-school art program-related studies related to the three themes.

**Parent-Child Interaction and Child Developmental Outcomes**

Parent-child interaction research is mostly focused on the correlation of children’s cognitive development and their academic achievement, referring to Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development that proposes individual development occurs during interactions with better-skilled partners. Gündüz’s (2018) research on parents’ interactions and their children’s learning levels showed that parental coaching via a social network increases teacher-parent, parent-parent and parent-child interactions as well as children’s academic achievement. The researcher indicates that parental involvement and the collaboration among parents, teachers, and children are the foundation of creating an effective and successful learning environment for children. Similar to Lukie et al.’s (2014) research, the researcher claims that children’s interests and a collaborative parent-child interaction influence literacy and numeracy exposure in the home. Additionally, Obradović, Finch, Yousafzai and Rasheed (2016) investigated the influences of maternal scaffolding and home stimulation on children’s cognitive development. The research showed that maternal scaffolding behaviors in toddlerhood were a significant longitudinal predictor and mediator of the intervention effects on verbal intelligence, performance intelligence, and executive function skills of four-year-old children.
Obradović et al. (2016) suggested that promoting parents’ scaffolding skills can be a way to foster the development of disadvantaged children who live in poor quality environments and low-income families. Likewise, Szechter’s and Liben’s (2007) and Fan’s (2012) studies showed that parent-child dynamics and home environments contribute to children’s aesthetic understanding of art and acquisition of concepts that have a life-long influence on them.

Although these studies are helpful in identifying specific contextual factors that associated parents’ involvement with their children’s developmental outcomes, the subtleties in parent-child interaction need further investigation.

**Parent-Child Interaction and Parents’ Characteristic-Related Factors**

Szechter and Liben (2007) found no significant association between parents’ and children’s art-related discussion variables and measures of children’s art interest, aesthetic understanding, or aesthetic preference. The researchers explained that demonstrating aesthetic articulation or explanation of preference requires higher cognitive developmental skills, and it might be challenging for young children to articulate their aesthetic choices. Szechter and Liben (2007) suggest that an association between the art interests of parents and children may be found later in development when children’s interests are more varied.

Rasmussen, White, King, Holiday and Densley’s (2016) research on predicting parental mediation behaviors showed that parents’ attitudes can effectively influence children’s responses. According to their study, parents who think critically about media reported more positive attitudes to engaging in more frequent parent-child interactions about media use, which may alter children’s responses to media exposure. Similarly, de Oliveira and Jackson (2017) indicated that dispositional empathy could motivate parents to take action to support their children’s well-being.
and leads to dyadic success. According to their research, mothers who perceive themselves as more empathetic toward their children tend to increase their level of physical and cognitive support when their children need assistance with difficult tasks. Similarly, Posada, Trumbell, Noblega, Plata, Peña, Carbonell, and Lu’s (2016) research showed that maternal sensitivity and maternal care, such as harmonious interactions and secure base support, are important for children’s attachment security during early childhood. Moreover, Pino-Pasternak, Whitebread, and Tolmie (2010) examined the association between parental socioemotional behaviors and children’s self-regulated learning (SRL). The results showed that the more parents and children displayed positive behaviors, the less they displayed negative socioemotional behaviors. Also, the nature of the social interaction also facilitates the emergence of self-regulatory behaviors on the part of children.

These studies revealed maternal and paternal quality and sensitivity, instructional styles, and mutually responsive orientation are associated with and influence the quality and the effectiveness of parent-child interaction. In other words, parents’ personal characteristics initiate certain behaviors, and these behaviors impact their children’s responses and further determine the quality of parent-child interaction.

**Parent-Child Interaction in Cross-Cultural Contexts**

Posada et al. (2016) observed mother-child dyads at their homes and at parks across four sample populations: Colombia, Mexican immigrants to the United States, Peru, and US dyads. The results indicated that mothers who are sensitively responsive to their preschoolers’ communication and behavior tend to have children whose behavior indicates trust in their mother’s availability and response. Yet, Bornstein et al.’s (2008) research regarding country,
region, and gender differences in emotional availability (EA) showed Italian mothers were more sensitive and optimally structuring, and Italian children were more responsive and involved than children in the Argentine and US dyads. Although the results are slightly different between these two studies, both studies emphasized that maternal sensitivity positively influences parent-child interaction and further influences child development.

Other research found a similarity in parent-child interactions between two cultures. Cheung’s and Pomerantz’s (2015) study regarding parents’ involvement in children’ learning in the United States and China showed that parents’ involvement contributes directly to the value children place on school achievement. Specifically, the more involved parents were, the more children perceived them as placing heightened value on school achievement. According to the researchers, the value development pathways were similarly evident in the United States and China, even though Chinese parents tended to exhibit more control in their involvement in children’s learning than American parents. Crane and Fernald (2017) examined whether European American and Japanese mothers’ speech to preschoolers contained exchange- and alignment-oriented structures that reflected culture-specific models of self-other relatedness. Crane and Fernald concluded that cultural factors play a role. Specifically, American mothers tended to favor linguistic structures that emphasized interpersonal idea exchange, whereas Japanese mothers favored consensus-oriented speech that focused children’s attention on shared experiences and emotions and framed the two as sharing a common point of view.

Similarly, Roopnarine et al. (2014) found that ethnic socialization mediated the association between parenting practices and prosocial behaviors. Referring to Vygotsky’s (1997) cultural-historical approach and Bronfenbrenner’s (1979; 1989) social ecological model, Roopnarine and Davidson (2015) highlighted that social context factors may play key roles in
determining childhood development above and beyond parenting practices. They proposed that parent-child play may have strong and potentially direct associations with childhood development in societies where play is accepted and encouraged as a primary medium for childhood social and cognitive skills. In contrast, if societies do not embrace such a perspective, then such direct associations will be less visible.

Similarly, Bornstein et al. (2008) used a cross-national framework to examine country, region, and gender differences in emotional availability (EA). The researchers argue that EA normatively differs across country, region, and gender even early in childhood and that EA enhances our understanding of the critical aspects of child development, parenting, and the family system.

**Out-of-School Art Program-Related Studies**

Parent-child interactions and home environments contribute to children’s aesthetic understanding of art and acquisition of concepts that have a life-long influence on them (Szechter & Liben, 2007; Fan, 2012), and children’s paintings reflect their psychological phenomena, family life situations, and parent-child dynamic (Fan, 2012). Awareness of Vygotsky’s (1978) social constructivist perspective has emerged among early childhood art educators, and this change helps them recognize the importance of adults’ roles in children’s art-learning experiences when they need “sensitive, responsive adults who support their development through visual art experiences” (McClure et al., 2017, p. 155).

In relation to out-of-school art programs, research showed that frequent interpersonal relations and spontaneous communication and cooperation are increasingly receiving attention as possible mechanisms for cognitive change (Lukie et al., 2014; Obradović et al., 2016; Szechter &
Liben, 2007), which can be an applicable research model for out-of-school art program-related investigations. Specifically, two possible directions can be taken into account: 1) how maternal scaffolding and home stimulation influence children’s artistic development and their art performances and 2) how parental involvement in an out-of-school art programs influence disadvantaged children’s development. Although an out-of-school art program-related study cannot address every dimension of the parent-child interaction-related topic, it can raise the researcher’s attention and sensitivity when conducting interviews and observation as well as analyze the interconnection among all the data.

Studies on parental characteristics in parent-child interactions provide significant information regarding parents’ and children’s interpersonal dynamics in an out-of-school art program. Research revealed that children with more positive attitudes toward art reported a greater number of art-related experiences. Also, children’s attitudes were more positive among those who took an art class outside of school (Szechter & Liben, 2007). Szechter’s and Liben’s (2007) found that art interest was associated with physical proximity to their parents. Specifically, when parents and their children were doing collaborative art activities, parents with greater interest in art sat physically closer to their children. The researcher further suggested that parents’ physical proximity might reflect the parents’ desire to get a better look at the art projects because of their own interest in seeing them, or it might reflect a more socially driven desire to engage their children, which parallels the studies of parents’ characteristics within parent-child interaction.

Parent-child interaction investigations in a cross-cultural setting provide a different way of examining out-of-school art programs, especially when comparing two out-of-school art program in two cultures. There are three aspects for the potential applications: 1) utilizing the
perspective of the social ecological model, 2) referring to the study approach when examining
different social contexts, and 3) taking the strengths of the studies and avoiding the weaknesses.
How researchers utilized and interpreted the social ecological model and related theories as the
philosophical foundation (e.g., Roopnarine & Davidson, 2015) can be appropriate and useful
when conducting out-of-school art program-related research because parent-child interactions in
an out-of-school art program setting involve micro and macro factors. Additionally, the findings
regarding the factors that mediated parental behaviors and parent-child interaction (e.g.,
Roopnarine et al., 2014 and Crane & Fernald, 2017) can be indicators for analyzing the gathered
data from two cultural research sites.

**Family’s Resourcefulness in Out-of-School Art Learning**

Art learning experiences in childhood are crucial and can determine individuals’
perspectives of art throughout their lives. Parental influence is an inseparable factor because
parents are the gatekeepers who determine their children’s out-of-school art learning
opportunities (Hsiao & Pai, 2014). A lack of art classes in the early school stages might limit
children’s imagination, creativity, and confidence of art making (McClure et al., 2017). To
improve this situation, outside-of-school art programs can play a significant and effective key
role that not only enriches children’s art learning experiences but also encourages parental
involvement (Wiley & García, 2016). However, compared to in-school learning, outside-of-
school learning requires additional investment and resource allocation by families. To fulfill the
educational need for their children, parents encounter a resource management problem regarding
how to effectively allocate resources to improve and enrich their children’s art learning
experiences outside of school.
To analyze families’ resource allocation regarding a child/children’s out-of-school art learning, the following section presents three themes that identify the potential resources for families, the approach to optimize and improve the existing public educational resources, and the correlation between families’ socioeconomic status and children’s out-of-school learning opportunities. The first theme is the influence of engaged scholarship. Regional universities are significant resource providers to fill families’ educational needs for out-of-school learning for children, which highlights the engaged scholarship of universities that not only serves families’ educational needs but also strengthens the university-community partnership. The second theme is the influence of local engagement. Positive community engagement and relationships can improve public resources and emphasize the concept of improving and maintaining the quality of an out-of-school program that requires engagement by families and the community. The third theme is the influence of socioeconomic status. Parents with higher socioeconomic status are more likely to invest in children’s out-of-school art learning.

**Influence of Engaged Scholarship**

The concept of university-school partnerships and the benefits of resource-exchange from both parties present an effective model of educational resources allocation (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2015). However, the influences of university-school partnerships at family and community levels tend to be underestimated and require more discussion (Bowers, 2017; Luter, Lester, Lochmiller, & Kronick, 2017;). The practice of engaged scholarship, as Boyer (1996) defined, should be “connecting the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems, to our children, to our schools, to our teachers, and to our cities” (p. 32). The trend of engaged scholarship motivates universities to extend their
resources from private resources to public resources. One of the community engagement approaches is to provide educational resources to meet families’ educational needs beyond what K-12 school settings can offer.

Luter et al. (2017) state that bridging universities and schools could mutually improve practices and create various possibilities. Specifically, out-of-school programs serve as not only a pathway for positive child development but also provide resources to the school community to improve learning experiences and opportunities for children. Luter et al. (2017) suggested that universities can be agents that foster socially conscious issues and promote school and community engagement. McGrath and Erwin (2015) claim that a university-based community program is a proposition that not only provides a practical environment for pre-service teachers but also offers extra help and opportunities to enrich children’s learning experiences. The researchers specifically looked at how university, school, and community collaboration and interaction influenced the participants’ perceptions of their experiences in the program. McGrath and Erwin concluded that university-based community programs play a significant role in providing a unique learning opportunity to support children’s and their families’ educational needs. Most importantly, these programs also provide a practical environment for pre-service teachers to apply their knowledge to the curriculum in a safe and authentic setting and further reflect on their teaching experiences.

Luter et al.’s (2017) investigation highlighted that university-based out-of-school programs can foster socially conscious issues and promote school and community engagement, whereas McGrath and Erwin’s (2015) study concentrated on the university-based community program as a practical environment for pre-service teachers to gain authentic teaching experiences. Although these two studies have slightly different foci, they both state that
university-based outside-of-school programs play a significant role as educational resource providers. Because of the restrictions of time, location, finance, and teaching resources, K-12 school settings might have limitations about providing various contents of classes or programs. For parents who have different visions of and needs in education, reaching out to communities is a common strategy to gain the extra educational resources. For example, the parent-participants from Luter et al.’s (2017) study mentioned that the learning experiences from university-based out-of-school programs are different from the ones regular schools provided, and these valuable experiences enrich and expand their children’s life experiences. They also described the university-based outside-of-school program as being a pathway for positive youth development. Without the frame or restriction of formal learning standards, out-of-school programs open up multiple learning possibilities regarding learning subjects, forms, and participants. These programs can customize their curriculum by utilizing their existing tangible and intangible resources to serve families’ educational needs.

Influence of Local Engagement

Educational resources consist of tangible and intangible resources as well as private and public resources. As educational units, out-of-school programs are viewed as public resources because they are open to the public, even though the programs might be owned by an institution or group who have authority to direct the operation of the program. The quality of the program might change according to the status the institution and the availability of the resources. Generally speaking, a program located in a rural setting tends to be less likely to access diverse ranges of educational resources and sustain outside-of-school programs. Therefore, community engagement can be a significant support system to motivate and help the institution to improve
and maintain the program.

Rattigan-Rohr, He, Murphy, and Knight (2014) stated that the collaborative relationship between schools and parents could positively influence children’s learning. In their mixed-method investigation of family involvement in a collaborative tutoring program, the researchers explored the factors that motivated parents to continuously participate in the program and their perceptions of the influences of the program. The results of this study identified that the majority of the respondents had a positive attitude toward the program. Some respondents took advantage of what they had seen and learned from the class regarding learning strategies and class activities and practiced those strategies with their children at home. Moreover, Rattigan-Rohr et al. found one of the major factors that motivated parents to continue to participate in the program was their children’s cognitive and emotional development. In other words, the parents believed their involvement with the program and their children’s learning experiences in the program significantly supported their children’s learning. The parents brought a different energy to the class and generated a vivid dynamic that allowed pre-service teachers to experience a different dimension of educational approach.

Involvement by program participants and the community can improve the community’s public resources. Eckhoff, Hallenbeck, and Spearman (2011) conducted action research in an afterschool setting to explore how the project components related to engagement, content, and learning environment. The findings indicated that the art program not only enhanced children’s achievements and enriched their experiences, but the program also gave children a sense of belonging to the school/program and to the community. Eckhoff et al. (2011) emphasized that to strengthen future explorations in afterschool settings, content-driven and pedagogy-driven professional development are needed because of the limitation of outside-resources. Additionally,
this research embodied an issue regarding sustainable public resources. Human resources, such as teachers, are one of the essential intangible resources for education. For a rural community, teacher-resources might be a significant factor that results in whether an out-of-school program is permitted to continue. Expanding training for afterschool staff and bringing in local professional artists are fundamental approaches to sustain longer-term projects. In other words, program staff can be more engaged if they have substantial information and practical experiences regarding the art projects within the programs. Having local professionals, such as artists, become involved in the art projects can bring a stable intangible resource to the program and can create a close program-community partnership.

Parks’s (2017) and Casto’s (2016) studies provide a close look at the influences of community engagement and relationships on improving public resources within a rural setting. Parks claims that the majority of research regarding parental involvement in rural schools in the US has presented similar challenges, such as the issues of teacher quality, lack of resources, and parents’ limited educational experiences. This study focused on school practices that support the involvement of African American parents in their children’s early schooling as well as the relationship between these practices and the school’s rural context. The findings showed that two key resources mentioned by the mother-participants support their children’s learning. The first was the quantity and length of their relationships with school staff and with other parents. Because of the rural setting and the small size of the town, families tended to develop close relationships. The second key resource was the accessibility of the school. Parks pointed out that the school set up a friendly and open atmosphere that encouraged and promoted close communication with parents. In other words, having long-term relationships with the school staff and having the school accommodate the parents’ schedules were the key factors that made the
parents feel welcome. Moreover, Parks suggested that rural schools are much more likely to have strong community relationships and may be able to be more accessible and more responsive to parents. These strengths may empower educators to manage the challenges of rural school settings.

In contrast, Casto (2016) explored the connections that exist between a small rural elementary school and its local community. Specifically, Casto examined the school-community relationships conceptualized by school administrators, teachers, parents, and community members as well as the existing and the needed school-community partnerships. In particular, the researcher emphasized how the school and community members perceived the school-community relationships. Casto mentioned that the rural setting might have caused the school to be isolated from other schools in the district and could have restricted access to opportunities and resources. Additionally, the findings indicated there were no potential partners, such as local businesses. Further, the barriers to partnering are connected to lack of time because educators are required to devote time and effort to organize and maintain partnerships. Therefore, Casto suggested that utilizing place-based education, wherein the resources can be provided by local people, may combine the benefits of regional ties with a practice that ameliorated the challenges of time and isolation.

Compared to Casto’s (2016) and Eckhoff et al.’s (2011) studies, Parks’s (2017) research took place in a rural community where a high level of satisfaction with high-quality school-community relationships was present. According to Parks, a small community is more likely to create strong relationships with school and families, and a close and robust community relationship is more likely to encourage parental involvement and benefit children’s learning, which is also supported by Rattigan-Rohr et al. (2014). Moreover, Parks highlighted the vital role
of the parents in bridging a school/program and community to reinforce community engagement by bringing resources to a school/program. Parks and Rattigan-Rohr et al. both emphasized the strengths of a rural community that can empower educators to manage the challenges of rural school settings addressed in Casto’s (2016) and Eckhoff et al.’s (2011) studies. The above four studies pointed out the importance of community engagement and relationships as intangible resources within a community, such as social support and engagement of local businesses, artists, and parents, all of which can contribute to a higher quality learning environment for children in and out of school.

Influence of Socioeconomic Status

Children’s out-of-school art learning is a cross-dimensional resource management topic that refers to managing human needs, work and family life, time, and finances. Family financial status and time management can influence decisions related to out-of-school program selection because out-of-school learning requires additional investments, such as tangible costs and intangible efforts. Hsiao and Kuo (2013) and Hsiao and Pai (2014) conducted quantitative investigations regarding Taiwanese parents’ perceptions of their children’s art learning experiences in the early stage. Hsiao and Kuo’s research focused on parents’ attitudes toward afterschool art program selection, whereas Hsiao and Pai’s study concentrated on parents’ perspectives of children’s art production. These two studies are interconnected because how parents think about the value of art to their children might influence their decision in terms of placing their children in an afterschool art program. Both of the studies indicate that parents with higher socioeconomic status are more likely to invest in their children’s art learning through placing their children in an out-of-school art program or choosing a private kindergarten with an
add-on art class.

The purpose of Hsiao and Pai’s (2014) research was to explore Taiwanese parents’ beliefs of early childhood art education in preschool settings. Specifically, the researchers investigated the relationship between parents’ beliefs about early childhood art education and their children’s art achievements. The participants were parents with preschool children. The independent variables in this study were the parents’ background factors and parents’ beliefs regarding early childhood art education. The dependent variable was learning effectiveness. The results showed no significant correlation between a child’s ability to learn and the type of preschool the child attended, parents’ gender, and parents’ educational background. On the other hand, the results indicated that parents who live in urban areas have higher satisfaction with the effectiveness of art learning in preschool settings. Moreover, Hsiao and Pai also found that parents’ beliefs in art education were significantly correlated to their children’s ability to learn art. Specifically, having a higher score regarding their art educational beliefs results in higher identification with their children’s ability to learn art. Furthermore, the researchers suggested that although the results show the factors of urban areas and parents’ educational background influence their perspective of art education in preschool settings and their children’s art achievements, more in-depth investigations are needed to gain insight regarding parents’ perspectives of their children’s early art learning experiences.

According to Hsiao and Kuo (2013), many Taiwanese parents tend to place their kindergarten children in an afterschool art program to supplemental their traditional art education. To explore this phenomenon, they conducted research to investigate the factors that influence parents’ decision regarding the selection of afterschool art program for their children. The findings showed that parents’ decision-making about afterschool art class selection is
correlated with their socioeconomic condition, age, occupation, and education level. Parents who have a higher socioeconomic status, government-related occupations, and higher education degrees were more likely to place their children in an afterschool art class. Furthermore, Hsiao and Kuo (2013) suggested that the government should provide more art workshops/festivals for families to create a better art-learning environment at home. Additionally, universities should provide more opportunities for professional development for art specialists and art teachers in afterschool art programs.

Hsiao and Pai’s (2014) research showed that parents who live in urban areas have higher satisfaction with the effectiveness of art learning in preschool settings because living in urban areas allowed families more access to out-of-school art classes and parents were more likely to contribute to their children’s educational success. Additionally, Hsiao and Kuo’s (2013) research indicates that parents who have a higher socioeconomic status and higher education degrees were more likely to place their children in an out-of-school art class. This result implies families who have more tangible resources (e.g., money) are more likely to trade for the educational intangible resources they do not have but need or want (e.g., out-of-school art classes for children). Furthermore, parents who have a higher education degree were more likely to emphasize and value children’s inside- and out-of-school learning experiences (Hsiao & Pai, 2014).

Although these two studies indicate that parents’ socioeconomic status influenced their investment in children’s out-of-school art learning, this conclusion might not be generalizable to all Taiwanese populations. It could differ based on resource availability and resource allocation; it could also differ based on region settings and families’ resourcefulness. For instance, Parks’ (2017) research showed that the parent-participants exhibited positive engagement and high levels of satisfaction with the program and their children’s learning, despite their demographic
being characterized as low-income families and a rural setting. As Hsiao and Pai (2014) suggested, more in-depth investigations are needed to gain insight into parents’ perspectives of their children’s art learning and the factors that influence their decision-making.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section provides a comprehensive description of the methodology for this study. The following sub-sections include the a) phenomenological approach, b) research design, c) data collection strategies, and d) data analysis procedures.

Phenomenological Approach

This study is a dual-case, cross-cultural, phenomenological qualitative study (Seidman, 2013) using interviews, observations, and artifact collection as the data collection approaches (Merriam, 2009; Seidman, 2013). Parents selecting out-of-school art programs and placing their children in the programs are beyond a singular action; the choice and follow-through are complex configurations of their experiences, reflective thought, cultural capital, resource allocation, and interpersonal dynamic. In other words, this is the meaningful connection among the related sequences, the configuration components, and the consequences as a whole – namely a phenomenon. Parents looking for out-of-school art programs for their young children seems like something that simply happens, and art educators might not notice the underlying phenomenological meanings of this matter. As Vagle (2014) mentions, the phenomenological approach attempts to unpack and reflect the things we tend to assume we know. Aside from this, phenomenological research emphasizes reflecting on the essential themes that characterize the phenomenon. Vagle (2014) also states that “phenomena are the ways in which we find ourselves
being in relation to the world through our day-to-day living.” In relation to this study, I explored how the parents identified their perspectives of early childhood art education based on their experiences and their reflexive and contemplative examination of those experiences.

As a result, I incorporated a phenomenological interview approach that allowed me to observe and delve into how the participants saw themselves in relation to their life experiences, art-related experiences, and the experiences placing their children in out-of-school art programs. According to Schutz (1967), “All concrete social phenomena should be traced back to the modes of individual behavior” (p.4) because we understand a particular social form through detailed descriptions of human experiences. In art education research, Thompson (2014) states that phenomenological inquiry represents “a vital means of describing and interpreting the lived experiences of art and education” (p. 80), and multiple layers of context, relationships, and personal experiences constitute our “being-in-the-world” (p. 81). The phenomenological approach combines the description and the interpretation of lived experience, and the goal is to have the participants reconstruct their experiences within the research topic (Schutz, 1967; Seidman, 2013; Thompson, 2014). In this study, parents discussed their lived experiences and intentions of placing their children in out-of-school art programs through the process of reflection, recognition and identification (Schutz, 1967).

Additionally, to be “anchored in real-life situations” (Merriam, 2009, p. 51), a case study approach was utilized to emphasize holistic descriptions in a particular situation (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009) and gain in-depth understanding of “how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 14). The holistic descriptions of parents who place their children in an out-of-school art program can reveal their personal perspectives toward early childhood art education. Moreover, studies of
parents’ attitudes and beliefs about art education can further extend discourse on early childhood art education studies and improve discussions of partnerships among teachers and parents, children and parents and programs and communities.

For the purpose of conceptualizing the internal (e.g., parents’ educational experiences) and external (e.g., cultures and communities) factors that constitute parents’ decision-making regarding choosing an out-of-school art program for their children, I utilized a phenomenological in-depth interview to investigate parents’ narratives and their experiences. Erickson (1986) and Merriam (2009) stated that the context of a particular setting/population and the variables of the phenomenon are bound together. In the context of parents placing their children in an out-of-school art program, three tasks were essential to this study: 1) discovering the external factors, such as the socioeconomic conditions of parents, the representation of the programs, and the ideology of the communities; 2) discovering how the internal factors constitute parents’ personal values and intentions regarding early childhood art education; and 3) integrating the external and internal factors and developing practical strategies of meeting the needs of early childhood art education of families for future educators and leaders in art education.

Research Design

This study included two research sites and two research phases. The first site was in DeKalb, Illinois, US, focusing on the Northern Illinois University (NIU) Art Express Saturday art program, which is a university outreach art program for the local community. The second site was in Taipei, Taiwan, and took place at the National Taipei University of Education (NTUE) Children’s Art Camp and a private children’s art program called Magic Power of Art in Taipei City. In this study, I delved into the context of each research site, including the differences in
cultures, regions, and parents’ cultural capital, and analyzed how the contexts influenced the
participants’ mindsets regarding placing their children in out-of-school art programs. For each
research site, the participants included children ages four to seven who were enrolled in the out-
of-school arts programs, the children’s parents, the teachers, and the supervisors of the programs.
Additionally, Art Express is the only regular long-term out-of-school art program in DeKalb. It is
a non-profit program affiliated with NIU. In contrast, Children’s Art Camp and Magic Power of
Art Program are two independent entities out of 110 art-related out-of-school programs in Taipei
(Taipei City Government, 2020c). Although Children’s Art Camp belongs to NTUE, it is an
independent profit-driven organization.

This research was carried out from November 2018 to November 2019. The four foci of
the research were 1) participants’ contexts, art experiences, and educational experiences; 2)
children’s artistic productions in an out-of-school art program; and 3) participants’ work and
social networking experiences that influenced their perspectives toward art education. According
to Erickson (1986), “All human groups have some form of social organization,” and “regularly
interacting sets of individuals possess the capacity to construct cultural norms by which their
social ecology is organized” (p. 128), which parallels Bogdan and Biklen’s (2006) qualitative
approach that emphasizes everyday life and human interaction. The “distinctive microculture”
(Erickson, 1986, p. 128) of the two populations was the prime foundation in that a particular set
of individuals share certain specific local understandings and traditions developed as a result of
their daily life experiences and interactions among the people in the community. When
investigating parents’ perspectives of their preschool children attending an out-of-school art
program from different cultures, researchers must comparatively analyze the social ecology of
both sites (Erickson, 1986).
Description of Data

Participants

In this research, I utilized purposive sampling to select the participants. According to Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun (2011), a purposive sampling is a sample selected because the individuals have some special set of characteristics or because of the specific purpose of the study. The participants included 13 parents and their children who were enrolled in an out-of-school program as well as two teachers and one supervisor of the program from each site. The total number of participants was 26 parents, 4 teachers, and 2 program supervisors. I also observed two classes, including the age 4 to 6 group and the age 7 to 8 group. There were 11 children in the age 4 to 6 group and 10 in the age 7 to 8 group. In following sections, I describe the public demographic information about the parent-participants for both research sites: DeKalb, Illinois, USA. and Taipei City, Taiwan.

According to the US Census Bureau (2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d, 2019e), the estimated population of DeKalb County was 104,896 in 2019. Parents who most likely had children ages 4 to 7 were in the 25 to 44 age range, and the population of this age range was 24,372 in 2019. Children under the age of 5 were 5.6% of the population, which was 5,855, and ages 5 to 9 (5.2%) were 5,479 in 2019. The estimated total families was 22,971, and the average family size was 3.23 (person). The total households with children under 6 years old was around 2,332. As far as educational attainment, the population from age 25 to 44 (10,162) had earned a bachelor’s degree or higher. In 2019, the median household income of DeKalb County households was $63,317. The median household income by race was White: $67,578, Black or African American: $23,280, Asian: $22,310, Hispanic or Latino origin: $55,949.
According to the Department of Civil Affairs for the Taipei City Government (2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d), the total estimated population of Taipei City was 2,642,877 in 2020. The population of age 25 to 44 was around 767,063. The population of children under the age 5 was 126,241, and children aged 4 to 7 were around 105,753. The estimated total number of families was 1,061,000, and the average family size was 3.2 persons (Taipei City Government, 2019a). The population ages 25 to 44 (520,302) had earned a bachelor’s degree or higher (Taipei City Government, 2019b). The median income of families was US $45,176 (Taipei City Government, 2020b).

DeKalb is considered a suburban area and a part of the Chicago metropolitan area with a lower population density. On the contrary, the Taipei metropolitan area (including Taipei, New Taipei City, and Keelung) has a bigger population density and a higher demand for public facilities and educational institutions. The total area of DeKalb County is 635 sq mi (1,640 km2) and the population density is 160/sq mi (61/km2), whereas the total area of the Taipei metropolitan area is 874.59 sq mi (2,457.13 km2) and the population density is 8,042.7/sq mi (2,862.7/km2).

Although individualism and collectivism are often used to characterize the cultural values of the United States and Taiwan, Wang and Tamis-LeMonda (2003) argue that this dichotomy of cultural values does not sufficiently describe the child-rearing perspectives of parents in Taiwan and the United States. For example, their research shows that both US and Taiwanese mothers considered independence more important than obedience. However, theirs and other studies (e.g., Newland, Chen, Coyl-Shepherd, Liang, Carr, Dykstra, & Gapp, 2013; Wang & Tamis-LeMonda, 2003) do show that the priority of parenting values was different in US and Taiwanese societies. According to Wang and Tamis-LeMonda (2003), Taiwanese mothers viewed politeness, humility,
responsibility, getting along with others, not wasting, diligence, and following social rules to be the most important child-rearing values, whereas US mothers considered love/attachment to family, curiosity, self-esteem, and compassion/consideration to be the most significant child-rearing values. Moreover, compared to US parents, Taiwanese parents reported greater caregiving involvement and greater parenting influences from extended family. On the other hand, US parents reported greater involvement in socialization, physical play/exploration, leisure activities, school-related activities at home and school, and greater levels of family and church support as well as greater dyadic consensus with their spouse or partner (Newland et al., 2013). Thus, it is crucial to be aware that the two groups of participants might share some similarities while also having cultural differences. Also, overly simplifying or stereotyping either group should be avoided while analyzing their narratives.

Location of Data/ Research Sites

Art Express, DeKalb, Illinois, US. The first research site, Art Express, is a Saturday school art program offered by the Northern Illinois University (NIU) Community School of the Arts. NIU is a public research university in DeKalb, Illinois, United States. The NIU Community School of the Arts is an outreach program of NIU’s College of Visual and Performing Arts. Art Express is the only regular long term out-of-school art program in DeKalb.

The teachers for Art Express are art education major students from the Art+Design Education Department of NIU, who are supervised by NIU School of Art faculty. Art Express integrates with the ARTE 482 – Clinical Experiences in Studio Pedagogy course offered by the Art+Design Education Department. Students who are enrolled in this course teach for Art Express. By finishing this course, students earn 25 clinical hours. The current supervisor has
been supervising Art Express for more than seven years.

Art Express is held for six Saturdays during the fall and spring semesters, normally from September to October and February to March. Children create arts and crafts through a variety of media in a fun and exploratory atmosphere. Every semester, new lessons with a new theme are designed and taught with an expressive and multicultural approach to encourage children to use their imaginations as they create new projects. On the final day, parents and children participate in interactive art activities, conduct a final presentation, and take their artwork home. The classes are organized by age and limited in size. The age range of students is from 4 to 12, the time of the class is from 1 to 3 p.m., and the location is in the Jack Arends building where the School of Art and Design is located. The art supply fee for Art Express is $50, but it is waived for children and grandchildren of NIU employees, NIU retirees and currently enrolled NIU students. However, a $15 registration fee is due for each student.

In Spring 2019, there were 41 students total enrolled in Art Express who were divided into four classes: ages 4 to 6, 7 to 8, 9 to 10 and 11 to 12. For this study, I focused on ages 4 to 8, and observed the teacher-child and parent-child interactions as well as the children’s learning attitudes and the overall dynamic of the class.

Children’s Art Camp and Magic Power of Art Program, Taipei, Taiwan. The second research sites included a university outreach art program, Children’s Art Camp, and a private art program called the Magic Power of Art. Children’s Art Camp is affiliated with NTUE, which is an institution of higher education and the normal school in Taipei, Taiwan. Children’s Art Camp is one of the children-oriented programs under NTUE’s Extension School, which is a for-profit institution that offers various programs for the public during spring and fall semesters as well as summer and winter breaks.
Magic Power of Art is a for-profit, independent entity that offers regular art classes both weekdays and weekends. The art teachers for both two programs are art professionals and artists from outside of the K-12 school system. According to the Taipei City Government’s (2020c) statistics, 110 art-related out-of-school programs (independent entities) exist in Taipei City.

Each session of the Children’s Art Camp is five days in a row from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. The Camp is located in the general building of the NTUE Extension School. The cost for each session is $170, including program, registration, and art supply fees. The classes are organized by age and limited in size, and the age range of students is from six to nine. I observed two sessions of the Children’s Art Camp during Summer 2019, and both sessions had 18 students. The content of the art class was totally decided and designed by the teacher. The administration office sent one undergraduate volunteer as a teaching assistant who helped the art teacher distribute art supplies and do the cleanup.

As far as the Magic Power of Art program, I was not able to observe the class in person. I learned the art teachers’ teaching style, strategies, and the atmosphere of the class through the descriptions from the parent-participants, the program’s Facebook page, and the website. The cost for attending the program is $55 per session, and every session included four art classes. The art program was organized as one art class per week for 90 minutes.

Each art program had unique conditions and resources and cannot be quantified for the return on investment by comparing the cost of attending the class. The nature of non-profit and for-profit determined the class fee and the structure of the program. In other words, Children’s Art Camp and Magic Power of Art Program were more expensive than Art Express. Although the program fee was not the primary focus of this study, it still needed to taken into consideration when analyzing parents’ perspectives of the art programs.
Data Collection Procedures

The data were collected in three stages: pre-stage, formal-stage, and completion-stage. In the pre-stage, the main task was submitting an application for IRB approval of the interview and observation protocols. I received the IRB approval letter in November 2018 and immediately contacted the gatekeepers to reach the potential participants as well as plan the interviews. While I was contacting the participants and determining the interview and observation dates, I also created an interview outline and conducted expert validation tests that confirmed the content of the outline. To protect the researcher and the research participants, an interview consent form was used. In the formal-stage, the interviews were conducted first and followed by observations. In the completion-stage, the major tasks were organizing the data and conducting the initial research analysis.

In the following section, the three data collection techniques used to triangulate the data – including interviews, observations, and artifact collection – are explained. In qualitative research methodologies, triangulation helps researchers find the coordinates for multiple data sources to better analyze the findings (Vagle, 2014). Also, triangulation plays a role in helping more fully justify claims and increase the validity of the themes and assertions. In this research, the three data collection techniques offered a comprehensive look into participants’ socioeconomic conditions, personal values, and intentions when placing their children in an out-of-school art program.
Data Collection

Interviews

The interviews took place in the US and Taiwan, and the interviewees were primarily, but not exclusively, parents. Narratives from teachers and supervisors were used to triangulate the data, provide support, and re-examine the interview reliability. Seidman (2013) indicated, “The root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 8). Effective interviews not only reveal the information regarding how people interpret the world around them, but also provide insight into the participants’ behavior, perspectives, and attitudes (Merriam, 2009; Seidman, 2013). Because I was interested in the parents’ perspectives of their experiences placing their children in an out-of-school art program, data collection utilized a semi-structured and front-ended interview technique adapted from “in-depth, phenomenologically based interviewing” (Seidman, 2013, p. 14). The purpose of this interview approach was to develop and explore the participants’ responses to questions and have them reconstruct their experiences within the research topic.

As far as the interview procedures, potential interviewees were first contacted via phone, email, Facebook, or in-person to provide a description of this study. To accurately select a sample that met the criteria for participants, I first contacted the administrators asking for permission to view the student roster and then selected interviewees from the relevant age groups. After the interviewees agreed to participate in this study, I scheduled an interview with each person. The interviewing process included in-person and virtual interviews of parents, teachers, and program supervisors, depending on the interviewees’ preferences. Conducting in-person interviews was a priority for this research. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90
minutes and was audio-recorded for the data analysis. Each interviewee was provided two copies of the consent form (see Appendix A). The researcher and the interviewee each kept one signed copy of the consent form for reference. I conducted semi-structured interviews with an interview guide, which included questions that needed to be addressed in this study (see Appendix B). The purpose of the interview guide was to provide a prompt when conducting the interview.

Additionally, the content of the interview included, but was not limited to, the set of questions on the guide. The parent-participants were encouraged to express their experiences and contexts, including educational experiences, personal perspectives toward art education and the art programs, purposes for placing their children in an out-of-school art program, and their interpersonal dynamics with other parents, children, and the teachers in the program. In addition, the teacher- and program supervisor-participants shared their teaching and administration philosophy as well as their observation of the children and interaction with the parents. Those descriptions played a role in triangulating parents’ narratives. At the same time, I encouraged interviewees to bring forward their own questions and adjusted the interview procedure and content accordingly.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sites</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Supervisors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan (Site #1)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US (Site #2)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The interviews offered an overarching perspective of the participants’ contexts, perceptions of the children’s art program, and description of their children’s experiences in the program. The primary goal was to “establish the context of participants’ experience” (Seidman, 2013, p. 20) and analyze how their contexts and experiences affected their perceptions and their children’s art-learning experiences. The questions covered the parents’ educational histories, previous experiences with art education, personal family backgrounds, purposes of placing their children in the program, and descriptions of their children’s previous art-learning experiences.

The interviews also allowed the participants to “reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurs” (Seidman, 2013, p. 20). The interviews investigated the participants’ descriptions of the program, their children’s learning experiences in the program, their interaction with other participants and their children’s art productions. The interview data provided a deep understanding of the participants’ current perspectives toward the study topics as they reflected on the art program experience. Also, the participants were able to re-examine how the art experiences impacted their children’s art-making motivation afterward and how the art-related dialogues between their children and themselves shaped the parents’ perspectives toward art education.

Another goal of the interview was to encourage the participants to “reflect on the meaning their experience holds for them” (Seidman, 2013, pp. 20-21). More specifically, I encouraged the participants to integrate their lives with the experience of participating in the programs by reflecting on how their past and present experiences impacted their perspectives of art education. Moreover, the questions prompted the participants to look at how the factors in their lives interacted to bring them to their present situation and asked them how their present situations and understandings will influence their future interactions with their children.
Observations

The purpose of observation is to “generate practical and theoretical truths about human life grounded in the realities of daily existence” (Jorgensen, 1989, p. 14). Also, the approach of participant observation helps researchers observe and learn while “participating in the daily rounds of the lives of others” (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011, p. 1). When conducting an observation, a researcher is able to directly see how the process of a particular event or an action occurs, develops, and changes. Additionally, observations also provide researchers with opportunities to understand the attached meanings of behaviors that might not be found from interviews. According to Chen (2007), the observation method is the most effective approach when investigating the continuity, the relevance, and the context of a research. In this study, observations helped me directly and completely understand the interpersonal dynamics among the participants in the program. Moreover, the data from observations were a strong supplement that underpinned the interview data throughout the data analysis.

Obtaining permission was the first step for carrying out the observations. I first identified the gatekeepers for the programs to get permission to conduct observations (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). In the meantime, I confirmed the observing questions, made observation plans, and designed an observation outline (Chen, 2007). These preparations helped me quickly and efficiently adapt to the research sites. Furthermore, I used Spradley’s (1980) three major types of observation when conducting the observations: descriptive observation, focused observation, and selective observation. At the beginning stage of the observations, I made descriptive notes when looking at a social situation and tried to record as much as possible. Specifically, I had general
questions in mind, such as “what is going on here?” Appropriate descriptive questions led to effective descriptive observation, so I gained skills in observation while gaining skill in asking the right questions (Spradley, 1980). As the observations continued, I started focusing on certain situations and further selecting participants according to the research questions, observed objects, and condition of the research sites.

The observations were conducted in two programs: Art Express, DeKalb, Illinois, US and the Children’s Art Camp, Taipei, Taiwan. I observed the whole class for each program. By observing the interactions among children and teachers in the class as well as the interaction among the parents, children and teachers when the parents’ dropped off and picked up their children, I gradually constructed a sense of the participants’ behaviors, motivations, actions, responses, reactions, and communication strategies within the setting. For the observation at Art Express, the class was held on February 2, 9, 16, and 23, and March 2, 9, 16, and 23. The class meeting time was from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm. For the Children’s Art Camp, the class took place from July 1 to 5 and July 15 to 19. Before the observations, the teachers, the program supervisor, and I thoughtfully discussed the observation protocol to ensure that the class went smoothly. The teachers and the program supervisor agreed that I should stay in the corner of the classroom to minimize the observer effect on the children. Also, the teacher introduced me to the students and explained my role in the class on the first day. Before the class started, I quickly drew a map of the room set-up in better record the interactions among the teachers and the students. During the class period, I took notes of the teachers’ instructions, the students’ reaction, their conversations, and the class time frame and schedule. As far as the Magic Power of Art program, although the teachers declined my classroom observation request, they directed me to check their website and social media pages, where they periodically uploaded teaching clips to the sites. Therefore, I
utilized the teaching videos and the parent’s descriptions of the class dynamic to compensate for not observing the classes. Table 3 represents the observation schedule.

Table 3
Observation Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation Schedule</th>
<th>Site #1 (US)</th>
<th>Site #2 (Taiwan)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Art Express</td>
<td>Children Art Camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation time</td>
<td>February-March 2019</td>
<td>July 1 to 5, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 6 days</td>
<td>July 15 to 19, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 1:00pm – 3:00pm</td>
<td>• 10 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• 9:00am – 12:00pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I took field notes during the observation process. When taking field notes, it was significant to write down details that “remain sharp and that easily transform into vivid descriptions... from envisioning scenes as written” (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 31). Therefore, I utilized the following strategies when taking field notes: 1) wrote down the details of what I sensed were the key components of observed scenes, events, or interactions; 2) recorded concrete sensory details about observed scenes and interactions; 3) recorded details of emotional expressions and experiences by those in the setting; and 4) noted the general impressions and feelings (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011).

Artifacts Collection

According to LeCompte and Preissle (1993), artifacts are “symbolic materials such as writing and signs and non-symbolic materials” (p. 216). Artifacts are created by a people who
have a particular perspective toward specific objects under a certain circumstance that represents a form of contract among people and between people and environments (Chen, 2007). Moreover, artifacts are created in natural situations that not only provide researchers with some background information but also have less direct intervention from the researchers (Chen, 2007). Artifacts can also be considered as triangulation and supplements of interviews and observations. Compared with interviews and observations, artifacts can extend the existing perspectives and embody thoughts and emotions that might not be able to be expressed verbally (Chen, 2007). In this study, the artifacts collection included program-related documents, students’ artwork, photos from the classes, information from the websites, and other materials from the participants. The artifacts were collected from the two sites from March 2019 to July 2019. Artifacts enriched the interview and observation data while also helping to illustrate more informational aspects of the participants’ experiences. Table 4 represents the connection between research questions and data collection techniques.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Artifacts Collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Question #1:</strong> How do participants describe their personal- and art program-related exosystem?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Question #2:</strong> How do participants describe their art experience- and art program-related mesosystem?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Question #3:</strong> How do participants describe the microsystem at home and in an art program?</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued on following page)
Table 4 (continued)

| Research Question #4: What reflective thought is described by parents who place their children in an out-of-school art program? | ✓ |
| Research Question #5: What macrosystems of the two research cases are revealed that influence participants’ perspective of out-of-school art program? | ✓ ✓ |

**Data Analysis Procedures**

This research aimed to analyze the context and experiences of parents in Taiwan and the United States who placed their children in an out-of-school art program. The data were collected through interviews, observations, and artifacts, and the analytic approach was divided into three phases: initial analysis, in-depth analysis, and integrated analysis. The details of each phase are as follows.

**Initial Analysis**

The first phase, initial analysis, which is inspired by Saldana’s (2009) first cycle coding, was relatively straightforward when compared to the other phases. Data analysis was conducted simultaneously while collecting data. According to Merriam (2009), Chen (2007), and Emerson et al. (2011), data collection and analysis are inseparable activities in qualitative research because gathering and organizing data must be based on the initial analysis. Furthermore, while researchers are gathering data, some insights, reflections and ideas emerge that direct the next round of data collection and “in turn lead to the refinement or reformulation of questions” (Merriam, 2009, p. 165). This interactive process of data collection and analysis is “recursive and
dynamic” (p. 169) and constantly operates in the researcher’s mind and pervades all phases of the research (Emerson et al., 2011; Merriam, 2009; Seidman, 2013).

Three types of data were prepared in the beginning of data analysis: the interview transcripts, the observation notes, and the artifacts. When the first set of data was gathered, open coding was used in the initial analysis. Open coding parallels LeCompte and Schensul’s (2012) general coding that refers to “identifying concepts, components, themes and initial sets of meanings in the database” (p. 99). I first read the data line by line and allowed the coding categories to emerge from topics, patterns, themes, and regularities in the data. For example, the participants’ descriptions of their K-12 art learning experiences and how they compared their art experiences with their children’s fell into one category because the information connected to the parent’s perspectives of art education. Following this, I examined similarly coded categories to identify patterns and themes. For instance, the parents’ art experiences constituted their initial perspectives on a good quality art program, which influenced the criteria for selecting art programs. Also, their children’s learning experiences may shape and alter their existing perspectives of art learning and further influence their decision-making regarding art program selection. Thus, the patterns of how the parents constructed their perspectives of children learning art emerged through the process of examining similar coded categories.

After the first stage of initial coding (open coding), I used structural coding methods that “apply a content-based or conceptual phrase representing a topic of inquiry to a segment of data” (Saldana, 2009, p. 66) to seek further detailed coding. A coding system is needed when utilizing structural coding. In this study, I used the research focus and components introduced in the introduction section to start as the first coding system (see Table 5). Simultaneously, I used emotions and values coding from affective methods to emphasize the participants’ perspectives
of their experiences. According to Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997), any system of data organization and synthesis must be flexible so the researchers can shift and change direction as they move from fieldwork to analysis and back to data collection. Although during the initial analysis the researcher might identify or reveal some salient topics and anticipated categories, it is important to avoid in-depth analysis that might “impose on the generative process of interviews” (Seidman, 2013, p. 116) before completing all the interviews and observations.

In the first coding system, there are four dimensions: participants’ exosystem, mesosystem, microsystem, and reflective thought. The exosystem refers to social systems in which children do not participate but that directly bear on their parents who interact with them (Heath, 2013). The mesosystem refers to the interrelations between two or more settings in which the parent-participant actively participates (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The microsystem refers to the setting in which people engage in face-to-face interaction (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Additionally, the participants’ reflective thought was an integrated condition that reflected their values, beliefs, and knowledge.

Under the exosystem category, this study sought foundational information about the participants, which included the community structures, parents’ educational attainment, parents’ social networks, and parents’ workplaces or work. Through examining the data from the participants’ exosystem, I was able to comprehend how their previous learning experiences and the social-ecological system formed their perspectives. The second focus, the mesosystem, included the participants’ art-related experiences and peer groups that may have impacted their perspectives of art education. The purpose of discussing the participants’ mesosystem was to effectively clarify the interrelationship among the participants’ and their children’s art experiences in the art program, influences from the participants’ peer groups, and how these
integral factors impacted their microsystem and reflective thought. Additionally, the microsystem refers to the setting in which people engage in face-to-face interaction (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This study focuses on the microsystem between parents and their children at home and the parent-child-teacher dynamic in out-of-school programs. The participants’ reflective thought resulted in their decision-making regarding placing their children in an out-of-school art program that focused on the participants’ description of their educational philosophy, perspectives of art, purposes for placing their children in out-of-school art programs, description of the art program, and description of their children’s art productions. Moreover, the analysis emphasized their interpersonal dynamic, which referred to the interactions and partnerships between parents and teachers as well as parents and children within the programs. The participants’ narratives of interpersonal dynamic provided another angle to help me conceptualize the influence of the ecological aspect of their experiences.

In-Depth Analysis

When making a transition to in-depth analysis, the researcher needs to review all codes and initial categories from the initial analysis (Saldana, 2009). The in-depth analysis was inspired by Saldana’s second cycle coding. According to Saldana, second cycle coding requires advanced analytic skills such as “classifying, prioritizing, integrating, synthesizing, abstracting, conceptualizing, and theory building” (p. 45). The in-depth analysis enabled me to move from multiple codes in Phase One to a few major themes/categories/concepts or theories/narratives. In other words, the major task of this phase is “fitting categories one with another and developing a coherent synthesis of the data corpus” (p. 149).
Table 5
Coding System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualities/Evidence</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Exosystem</th>
<th>Mesosystem</th>
<th>Microsystem</th>
<th>Reflective Thought</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifact collection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the in-depth analysis, I mainly utilized “pattern coding” (Saldana, 2009) to develop the “meta-code” (p. 150). After reading through similarly coded data from the initial analysis phase, I carefully looked at the relationships between codes from the first phase, identified the patterns in the code sets, and further developed new second-level codes. By grouping the relative codes into a smaller number of sets, I not only searched for rules, factors, and explanations in the data but also examined social networks and patterns in the participants’ relationships. Moreover, I used pattern code as an inspiration to develop a statement or assertion that “described a major theme, a pattern of action, a network of interrelationships, or a theoretical construct from the data” (p. 154).

**Integrated Analysis**

The final step of data analysis, the integrated analysis, was a cross-case analysis that compared the results of data analysis from the two research sites. According to Merriam (2009), “a qualitative, inductive multi-case study seeks to build abstractions across cases” (p. 204). Although a general explanation that fits individual cases was the purpose of this phase of data analysis, some unexpected challenges can occur because each individual case has its own unique context that might lead to different categories of analysis. Therefore, I first thoughtfully re-examined the coded categories from the in-depth analysis and compared the related and different categories. Afterward, I grouped the related categories, which were the potential themes and categories of the general explanation or congruity across the two research sites. When organizing
these related categories and themes, it was also important to refer to the original transcripts to
double check the participants’ narratives and the context to interpret the consequences
objectively. Moreover, I reviewed each category along with the original data to clarify the
context of any disjointed sets and to determine if anything was missing. These different themes
and categories needed to be carefully re-examined in the context to avoid imposing a stereotype
on a certain situation or overly interpreting a phenomenon. Eventually, I juxtaposed the layering
analysis results to depict and reconstruct the pattern of combining the data.
CHAPTER 4
NIU ART EXPRESS, DEKALB

Exosystem

In this study, the exosystem refers to social systems in which children do not participate but that have a direct bearing on their parents who interact with them (Heath, 2013). The community structures, parents’ educational attainment, parents’ social networks, and parents’ workplaces or work experiences are the components that make up the exosystem for this study. In the following sections, I analyzed the parent-participants’ exosystem at the first research site (NIU Art Express, DeKalb), including their perspectives of the community in which they live, the influences of their educational attainment, descriptions of their social networks, and the influences of their work experiences.

Perspectives of the Community

The participants’ descriptions of the city or town in which they currently live are important trails that reflect on their daily lives, experiences, and exosystem. Nine of the 12 parents were tied to or affiliated with NIU; they were either an employee/faculty member at NIU or an NIU alum.
University is the Educational Resources Provider in the Town

To many people in DeKalb, Northern Illinois University (NIU) is the most significant resource provider in the community. Like many college towns in the United States, universities stimulate economic growth and employment by attracting people to move to town for college, and NIU’s image and its brand have become an inseparable part of DeKalb. Aside from the economic benefit a university provides, the affiliated educational programs, events, and child development opportunities, such as NIU’s Saturday art program (Art Express) and the NIU Child Development and Family Center, are significant advantages for families in the community. As MP mentioned: “I would say that it’s [NIU Saturday art program] in a sense for kids a lot different than school art class, you know, outside activity art and it’s through the college” (in-person interview, February 18, 2019). CW also noted, “Campus childcare, almost everyone is amazing… and they’ve been really helpful… there aren’t very many affordable programs that have to do with the arts, like art and music. And so, um, having a free program at the university, it’s a very appealing” (in-person interview, February 22, 2019). Engaging in and developing sustained partnerships in communities has been an important focus for universities (Washington, 2011), and providing educational resources to benefit community development is a common and effective approach that displays a university’s leadership and its essential role. CW shared his view of the importance of the university to DeKalb:

DeKalb is not terrible, if you excised the university out of DeKalb, um DeKalb would be like many other a small Midwestern cities or towns which have really fallen on hard times in the last 20 or 30 years, as you know, factories and, kind of blue collar works has moved away and these companies have shut down, it’s a pretty sad place, but because of the universities here that kind of blunt force…we have the university and so things aren’t so bad. (in-person interview, February 22, 2019)

Although NIU provides resources to the community in various ways, some parents explained that
it has limitations due to its geographic location. As CH and SS mentioned:

DeKalb isn’t that far from Chicago, but it is far enough that you have to make an effort to get into the city…and so we try to take advantage of museums and plays and that kind of stuff because it just feels like there isn’t stuff here for them [children] to do. (CH, in-person interview, February 26, 2019)

When we first moved here, and I still have this feeling, but disappointed, within like overall the DeKalb Sycamore community just because we came from right outside Iowa city, which is a little more dynamic... there is such a vibrant drive to be in the arts. (SS, in-person interview, March 19, 2019)

Both CH and SS lived in the suburbs before they and their families moved to DeKalb, and they addressed similar issues regarding resource accessibility in the town. They noted that NIU’s Art Express is the only regular out-of-school art program in the city, explaining that the lack of art-related resources is the biggest challenge for families craving art learning opportunities.

Other parent-participants (JH, BG, MP, and IM) had different impressions about DeKalb. Both JH and BG grew up in a small rural town and moved to DeKalb to attend college; they also started their career and family here. To BG, DeKalb is a nice place to raise children because it has public institutions, such as the university and library, that provide many activities for families.

So, one thing that I really love about DeKalb is there are so many things for families to do, and there are so many things that families can do for free or cheap. So, we are always taking advantage of...we do a lot of things at the library. (n-person interview, February 8, 2019)

From JH’s perspective, having the university in town provides many family-friendly activities and makes the community vibrant. Her view was similar to what CW described in terms of the essential role of the university to the community.

I can find funny things to do. But, you know, a lot of people don’t feel that way if they’re used to being in like the suburbs or the city where seems to be a little bit more to do. But I think with the university, there’s plenty of things to do in DeKalb. (in-person interview, February 17, 2019)
All the parent-participants addressed NIU as the central figure in DeKalb that infuses energy and resources into the community. They felt that as a college town DeKalb presents unique attributes other towns and cities might not have. In this study, the presence of NIU was the most significant aspect of the exosystem that influenced these families’ experiences with out-of-school art learning.

Parents with different life experiences have their own thoughts about the community, and their subjectivity influences how they view and interact with the community as well as their expectations of the out-of-school art program in this study. In other words, the influence of the exosystem on the individuals, to some extent, depended on their subjective perspectives. In the following section, two parent-participants’ narratives touched on the experiences that influenced their viewpoints of the community.

Lack of Quality Art Learning Resources and Opportunities

Accessibility to art learning can indicate the educational condition and opportunities in an area. In other words, the number of families in the area, families’ needs in and for art programs, the number of art teachers, the quality of teacher training, and appropriate venues for art classes are interconnecting factors that influence the accessibility of art learning for children. Additionally, parents’ feelings and experiences may influence accessibility. For example, if parents have a lower demand for art learning opportunities, having one out-of-school art program in a town might be sufficient. In contrast, if parents have a higher demand for diverse art learning opportunities, it is more likely that various types of art programs, exhibitions, and workshops might be offered by schools or local institutions. For SS and CH, accessibility to art learning and other educational resources in DeKalb does not meet than their expectations.
So we try to take advantage of museums [in Chicago] and plays and that kind of stuff because it just feels like there isn’t stuff here [DeKalb] for them to do…The museum on campus are only open like 10 to two on weekdays. So we never can take them to do things…I know there’s an exhibition in the anthropology museum, which is all about dogs. They [children] are obsessed with dogs, so I have to find a time to take them. But again, it’s never opened on the weekend. It’s only open during 10 to two hours when they’re at school. So that kinda stuff makes me frustrated cause it’s like I want to take advantage of the things that we can take advantage of here [in DeKalb]. (CH, in-person interview, February 26, 2019)

According to CH, one of the greatest challenges for taking advantage of educational resources is schedule mismatching. When a university is the main provider for certain resources and the times and locations are determined by the university, the schedule might not be as flexible as parents want. Resource availability is different for each family and is influenced by the parents’ resourcefulness and ability to recognize and use resources effectively. For example, MG mentioned homeschooling could be a solution for her family to cope with time limitations: “If we homeschooled, it would take care of that time limitation” (MG, in-person interview, February 21, 2019).

SS and JH pointed out another challenge regarding their children’s art learning experiences. Having insufficient art classes in schools is a concern for them.

She [her child] goes to the public school system here in Dekalb and the art teacher I didn’t get to meet with him, but I got to email him and I told him that she was in Art Express. He really liked that because he was telling me they only get art every 10 school days. A lot of times they don’t have a full school week, they’ll have a half day or a teacher from a day or a holiday. So it’s like every 10 days, maybe like two or three times a month they get art in the school, isn’t a lot. He was like, we were just very basic, he’s like, I just teach them the basics basic. (JH, in-person interview, February 17, 2019)

I was astounded that his elementary school didn’t have an art class at all…There isn’t an art program within that district until high school. Oh, it’s painful. It’s just wrong…Um, so I enrolled him in an afterschool art program that they have. I really didn’t like it. It was very prescribed. It was literally, okay, this is the image that is drawn and you’re going to draw the exact same thing. (SS, in-person interview, March 19, 2019)

The challenges JH and SS experienced reveal issues about art learning in the school district. JH
mentioned that her daughter’s school has minimal art classes; consequently, the art curriculum’s complexity and diversity are limited. In SS’s case, although her son’s school offers an afterschool art program, the content and the structure of the art classes did not match her expectation of a quality art curriculum. For JH and SS, the solution they adopted was to place their children in NIU’s Saturday school art program.

VG’s impression of DeKalb’s education system provides another perspective related to JH’s and SS’s concerns. She pointed out that whether the school district supports certain disciplines can influence the budget issues as well as both the number of teachers in certain subjects and the quality of curricula. Educational policy and its operations are complex and involve many stakeholders in the community. Some of the exosystem’s unique characteristics are evident in the educational system, and VG’s description provided another way to see the community’s exosystem.

I think people here [DeKalb] are very, very nice, but I also feel like a lot of times it’s a kind of a limited worldview...a lot of their kids have a very limited range of experiences. So, um, and I feel like that’s also a part of living here is that there’s a limited range of experiences. Also, my husband and I really feel like many people who live in DeKalb have low expectations for children. They could have higher expectations. For example, we don’t understand like why the schools don’t put more money into things like classes that are accelerated at middle school or have foreign language earlier in school or things like this. Um, and they’ll put tons of money into keeping a very high level football team going and things like that. And that to us is alien cause we value education more and what school’s more important for the education. And they just think that the sports and the athletics is the be all and all. (VG, in-person interview, March 29, 2019)

Although having good quality art learning experiences is often determined by the instruction, accessibility to art resources and the art curriculum’s quality are also crucial factors of the exosystem that influence children’s out-of-school art learning experiences. Additionally, public educational resource allocation can be a signifier of the character of the community’s exosystem.
Influences of Educational Attainment

Parents’ cultural capital shapes their values (Bourdieu, 1984), and individuals’ educational background is an essential part of their cultural capital. Presumably, parents’ education-related or art-related degrees or experiences can form part of the cultural capital that causes them to think about their children’s learning and parenting from educational perspectives. The majority of the parent-participants had an education-related degree or work experience, and this characteristic became a significant exosystem factor that profoundly influenced the analysis of parents’ narratives in this study. Having experience studying educational areas, such as developmental psychology and instructional pedagogy, allowed parents to articulate their educational philosophy more precisely and how their experiences influence their parenting style.

BG was a former preschool teacher, and she was pursuing her EdD while this research was being conducted. BG mentioned her parenting style for her second two children changed after she attended college. When interacting with her second and third children, the approaches she used tended to be more open-ended. Also, BG applied some instructional methods and strategies she studied in her classes to help her children’s learning.

I’ve been through the college of education, I taught preschool. Um, and so the way in which I parent, I think I’ve learned a lot of things from when I was in school. Um, as good as far as like being a good parent, um, being consistent... with my younger two, I see myself being more open, and letting them explore more like in a play, letting them be participants of household routines. (in-person interview, February 8, 2019)

SS and her husband each had an art degree. From SS’s perspective, having their children exposed to art is essential part of their children’s education. Her art expertise and experiences allowed her to critically analyze an out-of-school art program. She noted that she cared about the actual art production and emphasized the developmental growth and conceptual aspect of the art
I had art class from K through 12. Like, it was just an embedded into the curriculum…I really want him [her child] to have this experience because both my husband and I are artists, this is important to us. Um, so I enrolled him in an after-school art program at the elementary school…it wasn’t like from an observational point of view…throughout out the whole time it was the same thing, and there was no growth or development or anything interesting about what was happening, it was not really what I wanted out of the supplemental art program since he didn’t have one within his school system. (in-person interview, March 19, 2019)

KR’s study experiences in college influenced her in a different way and went beyond receiving professional training. The courses provided a channel for her to seek answers about life, including family relationships and parenting. Those learning experiences directly influenced the way she interacted with her children.

Because to me, like when I was in a teaching program, although I didn’t complete it, I feel like I got answers to questions I had in life in general. Like why I was the way I was as a kid. When I was in the teaching program, I cried all the time. So often I would cry because it was like shining the light on things that I didn’t understand. So to me that was almost like therapy…that’s why learning about family relationships, so you can understand like if a child is acting a certain way, maybe there’s something going on at home. We can be empathetic to what they’re going through and just sort of not judge them but ask, “is there anything you need or is there anything we can help you with.” (in-person interview, February 23, 2019)

The professional competencies the parents obtained from college not only related to their career development but also influenced their parenting approaches. Because the research subject directly related to art and education, the parent-participants who had educational backgrounds seemed to articulate more in-depth and specific examples regarding how their educational backgrounds influenced their parenting and the decision making about their children’s learning.

Descriptions of Social Networks

Parents’ social networks refers to a broader scope of networking, including groups the
parents interact with and get information from. The social networks can be in-person or virtual, such as local organizations, workplaces, churches, homeschool groups, and social media groups.

Being involved in local organizations is part of CH’s life, and she learned about NIU’s Art Express Saturday School art program and music programs through her network of a symphony orchestra.

So my husband and I are both musicians... I play with the Kishwaukee symphony orchestra, and the director and the concert master are both heavily involved in the community school [NIU Community School of the Arts]. So we also had a connection. (in-person interview, February 26, 2019)

The NIU Community School of the Arts (CSA) offers various music classes and one-on-one music instruction for students of all ages, which is the most common music learning option in DeKalb. Thus, the members of the local symphony orchestra might be familiar with CSA’s music lessons. For CH, participating in the local symphony orchestra not only fulfilled her passion for music but also provided information about different aspects of life, including out-of-school learning opportunities for her children.

The workplace was another venue in which people built their social network. For CW, having colleagues with school-aged children was beneficial because he learned information about programs and family-oriented activities from them. “I think my colleague and his wife, they’ve had, uh, I think two daughters go through the program [Art Express] and they speak very highly of it, and I think a year ago we, we waited too long to register” (in-person interview, February 22, 2019). Additionally, JH ran a support group in her workplace, and she mentioned that people often shared and posted the events, activities, and programs in the group. She learned about Art Express through those groups at work.

I am involved with the hospital, so I do a lactation consultant, so I run like a breastfeeding support group. I used to twice a month and so I was really in it. I’m very
active in it. Um, so I think I either through that and then there’s some side groups that [Art Express] come up too and that people will post on there. (in-person interview, February 17, 2019)

The church was another important social network for many people, including BG. The church was the first place where she started building friendships when she moved to DeKalb. To BG, her friends from church were a major support system in terms of parenting, childcare, and emotional support.

Church was a big deal for me. I remember my first friend that I ever had when I moved here... we’re still great friends to this day. Um, and she kind of connected me with a church here. And so I built friendships through there. (in-person interview, February 8, 2019)

Similar to CH, MG made friends through church and work. Although MG met people at those venues, she did not build a solid social network until her first child was born. After having a child, MG started participating in activities and met other parents in different places. Some of the parents became close friends of MG, and they shared experiences of homeschooling and information about events and programs in the community.

I would say that for the first few years I didn’t have a strong social network, um, friends through church and met people through work. But my friends, my strong friends that I met mostly came after I had my first child because then there’s just, you are going to all the places that all the other parents are going to and you start to meet a bunch of people and you find other people that are similar to you that you like hanging out with…and I know quite a few people that do homeschool, we could play during the day and socialize during the day. (in-person interview, February 21, 2019)

Participating in local organizations, churches, and homeschool groups was the most common approach through which the parents developed their social network and where those parents learned information about family-oriented events and activities. Aside from in-person social networks, social media was another important channel for getting information about family-oriented events. According to BG, her friends on Facebook shared not only their everyday
life but also different programs and events in the community. It became her major way of connecting to the community and her friends because working and parenting had occupied all her time.

Um, it seems like these days everybody has their Facebook page where friends of the library, and friends of the park district, and friends of the movie theaters, and the bowling alley and, and so I feel like Facebook really is my big, big connection to the community and what’s going on. (in-person interview, February 8, 2019)

JH shared a similar thought about social media as an important component of her social network. According to JH, her virtual social network came from her in-person networks at work. Although she might see those friends and colleagues daily, communicating on social media was faster and more immediate, especially with regard to sharing information on events, activities, and programs in the community.

I’m on a lot of the mom sites for social media. So yeah, so there’s so many. I used to work with the hospital and um, a lot of moms, we got to know each other. And then we just communicate that way through online social media groups on programs and activities…And then special interest groups like mommy play dates are formed through that and we’ll say I’m one of my groups on Tuesdays at 10, I always know there’s something going on. I can just look on there and say, Oh, what park are they meeting or and then you just talk. (in-person interview, February 17, 2019)

Aside from the work-related social media group, JH was also involved in different mom sites and interest groups on social media. Those social media groups consisted of parents with various backgrounds in the community, and they shared information that might not be seen on a workplace-related social media. The diverse backgrounds of parents brought various information regarding activities, events, and programs, and JH learned about Art Express through those social media group pages.

There’s just so many different [social media] groups, but when they [her children] were really little, I was involved in the, um, they call it crunchy Momma, so a little bit more of like the holistic, earthy kind of alternative groups. And then now that I have school aged kid, it’s all just a mix of all of us. We don’t necessarily have a similar background. We
As a parent who took advantage of social media to gain information, JH also addressed a concern regarding the over dependence on social media, which happened to some millennial parents. According to JH’s observation and interaction with parents in those social media groups, she noticed that social media brought both advantages and disadvantages.

I think honestly with the millennial ages, and that’s what moms are now as the millennial moms, is they rely heavily, heavily on social media groups. Actually, Maybe too much. So, um, in some ways I’m like, they’ll take advice from a friend on social media more so than say a physician. Um, so I think they have a huge influence, um, decision making and marketing or awareness or just I think a lot of moms that I, especially, I’m the stay-at-home moms that might be their only outlet the whole day, you know, they’re home with multiple kids. That might be their only outlet to adult socialization. So I think they’re using it a lot… They might rely too much on say an opinion from another mom versus say like um… an evidence-based information from a position. So, like somebody in the group, a mom, posts a picture of their kid’s rash and they might ask another mom, what do you guys think this? And a mom might say, oh, I think it’s that. And then you know, you just get a whole bunch of different opinions on what you think it is. (in-person interview, February 17, 2019)

According to the parent-participants’ narratives, their social network was across local organizations, workplaces, churches, homeschool groups, and social media groups. Their social network was the primary channel for them to learn about parenting, community events, programs, and activities. Particularly, social media became a dominant information distribution agent that shaped the nature of these parents’ social networks and their decision making.

Influences of Work Experiences

Parents’ work experiences shaped their perspective, which might explicitly or implicitly appear in their parenting styles, which can further influence their children’s learning in general. The parents with educational experiences tended to directly apply instructional approaches and advice to help their children’s learning. Some parents integrated their reflection on interpersonal
relationships at work and the inspiration they learned from work into their parenting approaches. Additionally, the parents’ job attributes might be reflected in their house environment, which can inadvertently influence their children’s interests in certain matters.

CH used to be a high school English teacher. She talked about some essential qualities that students should gain from school and addressed her approaches to help students achieve their goals. She bridged the teaching experiences to parenting by adapting an effective and practical teaching framework to family education and helping her children work toward those goals.

The kinds of things that seem to make students successful in school. Like, being able to transfer knowledge from one subject to another. Being able to work independently, setting goals and being able to break down, how do I work towards that goal to achieve it. Um, as a teacher seeing that those were the kinds of things that help students to be successful in the classroom, and then having that framework with the kids at home. How can you put in place those things at home so that once they get to school, um, they’re able to start doing those things or at least be working towards those things. (in-person interview, February 26, 2019)

CH’s teaching experiences allowed her to see the possible challenges her children might have in school to help her children practice and prepare solutions in advance or as needed.

BG’s current job was as an undergraduate program advisor, a role designed to help students manage their course load and the progress of their course work. She had worked with various students who had different needs for many years. She discussed their goals and struggles with students and helped them set up a feasible plan to achieve their goals. Therefore, CH applied her advising experiences and strategies to help her son get through school.

He [her son] struggled in school so long, he really lacks the confidence that he needs academically... because I was an advisor here at NIU, um, I took on his advising role and we really, um, were strategic about taking a hard class and then taking, you know, some easier classes that he would do well in. And um, he got through. But boy it was, it was rough. (in-person interview, February 8, 2019)
Both CH’s and BG’s work experiences were directly related to practical aspects of education. Those experiences enabled them to implement multiple strategies at home, assess the outcomes, and recognize their children’s learning needs. They could then make appropriate interventions.

Compared to work experiences that can be directly applied to the children’s learning at home, some parents’ experiences tended to influence their children indirectly and might have a long-term influence. Specifically, the influences of interpersonal relationships constituted the parents’ work experiences and might further transform into reflections that can inspire their parenting approaches and focuses. For example, CH’s reflection on her teaching helped her make decisions regarding using positive and encouraging phrases when communicating with her children. Moreover, she learned to be clearer about how to balance the degree of parent intervention according to her reflections on conversations with other parents.

So, I taught for eight years before we had kids. I taught at the high school level, which is different than having a baby at home. But I think having eight years of classroom experience was helpful to me in thinking about, like I was saying before, language you use, when you talk to kids about what they’re working on or what they’re hoping to do or, um, how involved you are with the activities that they’re doing. Like, how hands on you are, how much you let them have freedom. Um, like conversations that I had with parents at parent teacher conferences and then thinking about, Oh, well, you know, what, when I have kids and I’m in this situation, how will I approach it or talk to a teacher about whatever. (in-person interview, February 26, 2019)

MP’s experience of working in nursing homes made her think more in-depth about her relationship with her mother, grandmother, and her daughter. Taking care of elderly people allowed her to be more sensitive about people’s needs and vulnerability, which further made her reexamine her dynamic with her mother, grandmother, promoting self-reflexivity.

I worked in a few nursing homes, um, quite a few. And I think that just caring for the other people... I think a bigger, like to have a bigger heart and see things from a different perspective. Um, a lot of people in nursing homes, you know, they can’t take care of
themselves. They need help. I think that softened my heart a lot too. I think that when I was growing up, since I hadn’t really had that interaction with my mom, it was a little harder for me to, I wouldn’t say love, but to understand what really caring for somebody and really just being there and giving somebody an unconditional amount of love, was like, um, cause I was pretty to myself. Um, I spent a lot of time with my grandma, but sometimes I didn’t know how to express myself. (in-person interview, February 18, 2019)

Additionally, observing different family interactions in the nursing home sometimes could be sentimental. Those experiences made her more aware of the influence of positive and negative family dynamic interactions and influenced her in many aspects, including her parenting style. MP mentioned that keeping family members company and being there for them when they need is the most important thing to her.

And you know, seeing that, seeing how in the nursing home, you know, they care for others or when their families come to visit or sometimes their families don’t come to visit. Sometimes there’s married couples and kids only come to visit one person. So, it’s sad, you know, you see a lot of different things working in that kind of environment…Caring for them [family] and giving them like company, just being there from them. When you get older, you are in a vulnerable, you feel like you don’t have anything, especially being in a nursing home, you are limited. So, I think that I’m always working with the older seniors has always been a really big learning and just influenced me a lot. (in-person interview, February 18, 2019)

Although AR’s job was in data science, he considered this work experience gave him insights beyond analyzing numbers. He interpreted his role as more like an artist who solved problems through creative approaches. AR believed being open-minded was an essential quality an artist must have because it motivates an individual to view things from multiple angles. He also thought that being open-minded can have a positive and life-long influence on individuals on various levels, such as communication and self-expression. Furthermore, AR considered art to be an essential foundation for society and child development and that people should value it more.

When I do the data science work, I think of myself as an artist because I have to think
about a problem in different ways, and painting and sculpting my mind to be more open
and looking at different dimensions of a problem, and listening to people. So, I think that
helps thought across the seas, down the road for other things too... but I think opening a
child up to be more open to having a way to express themselves, to be able to
communicate better with others and maybe draw some sense of self tradition and their
culture and appreciate other cultures. I think it’s very, very valuable for all those things.
And, and I think it’s too bad that I don’t believe society praise as much value on it even
though they like the fruits of it. (in-person interview, February 16, 2019)

Beyond actually applying knowledge from work, CH, MP, and AR’s examples provided a
different angle that individuals’ work experiences can influence them and their family through
self-reflection.

Another influence that parents’ work experiences might bring to their family and children
was the content of their job. This influence might not be deliberately set up; more likely, parents’
work extended naturally into their home environment as there is no way to definitively separate
work and home life. VG was a university professor, and one of her research focuses was textiles.
Because this research subject was imbedded into her scholarly career, she might talk about it
often at home, which might inadvertently influence her children. When VG’s children wanted to
do a project related to textiles, she was the first person from whom her children would seek help.

I actually work on textiles and history of textiles, and so I talk a lot about textiles, and I
have stuff around, like you could make textiles with or like so or whatever. Um, so she
[VG’s daughters] does see that and then she, she knows that I’m the one who can help
her. So, she’s always like, can you teach me how to do these things? So, I guess we do
some of that with her. (VG, in-person interview, March 29, 2019)

SS’s case was another example of how environmental factors influence children’s
learning motivation. SS’s husband’s job involved many hands-on mechanical projects, and they
set up an art studio at home with a 3D printer and other art equipment. According to SS, her
husband was keen on making art projects at home, which deeply influenced their children. They
usually designed objects with their children and encouraged exploration and experimentation.
SS’s children also took advantage of the equipment in the studio to make their own art projects. Parental encouragement and an art-enriched environment were significant factors that influenced SS’s children’s interests in art.

My husband is constantly working with them and making stuff. They made bow and arrows out of tree little, you know, tree sticks. I can’t think of anything today, um, so that was a recent thing, but they’re constantly making something. And my husband, just to give a little background on him, so he was obviously an art major too. So he did his major BFA in sculpture and then did his MFA and metals, and now he’s working as an engineer. So that’s the stage job because he’s very mechanically inclined. And so he just, with a lot of work and a lot of convincing and proving himself kind of showed that art was actually a good path for him. Um, but because of that, like we have a 3D printer at home, so we’re kinda, you know, they’re constantly designing things to be printed off as well. And then our downstairs basement’s kinda crazy. (in-person interview, March 19, 2019)

Although parents’ work experience did not directly relate to their children’s everyday lives, it still had explicit and implicit influences on their children’s learning. The explicit influences, for example, was applying their work skills to help their children’s learning. The implicit influences included parents’ working environment or contents shaping their points of view and inspiring different parenting approaches. Moreover, the home environment the parents created might be more or less influenced by their job contents. The environment created by parents can also influence their children’s interest in art.

Mesosystem

The mesosystem refers to the interrelations among two or more settings in which the parent-participant actively participates (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In this study, the parents’ mesosystem included their art-related experiences and the peer groups that may have influenced their perspectives of art education. The parents’ previous art-related experiences consisted of their interactions with the teacher and the other members of the previous art classes in which
they had participated. Additionally, the parents closely and frequently interacted with their peer groups, which had an influence on them.

**Art-Related Experiences**

The parents’ previous art-related experiences provided important information about their art-related contexts, which helped identify factors that might inform their perspectives of art and art education for children. According to the parents’ narratives, good art learning experiences consisted of a positive environment in which exploration was encouraged, art teachers’ positive feedback, and a sentimental memory attached to a certain art production experience. In contrast, experiencing a monotonous art class or not receiving art class at the elementary level resulted in a view that they had an inadequate ability for art creation. Moreover, the parent-participants mentioned their attention to art creation gradually declined as they entered middle school and high school due to other interests and outside activities. Although the parent-participants said they might not engage in art as often as when they were young, they felt the inner motivation of doing art was still in them and that they might find an outlet elsewhere, such as in other interests or their expectations for their children.

**Encouraging Exploration/ Artworks with Attached Meanings**

Different factors led to the parent-participants’ positive attitudes about their art learning experiences. They noted that an art program that provided diverse themes and encouraged multiple media exploration sparked students’ learning interest. Aside from the curriculum content, they said their personal interest and having a special memory attached to the artwork were also the reasons they loved art class.
SS was the only participant who had received regular art classes from K through 12. She mentioned the scale of the art projects was broad, advanced, and interdisciplinary. For example, she remembered that they did a puppet project and performed a puppet show. She still vividly remembered the details of that art production.

I had art class from K through 12. Like it was just an embedded into the curriculum... we had art class constantly. Um, so at the elementary level we had huge art classroom where we would go to. How frequently during the week that I don’t remember. But it was enough to really work on some bigger projects. Like we had fun besides doing drawing and painting and those classic things. Uh, we also would weave baskets and make our own puppets and create a whole puppet show. And so it was really, it was really fun and engaging and I can still remember like the feel of my puppet that I was making and the group of us that were putting together a little play. (in-person interview, March 19, 2019)

Additionally, SS mentioned the art classroom in her middle school provided students with spacious working areas and various art class options, including traditional observational drawing and culturally based themes. To SS, having a wide range of art lesson topics and media exploration was the main reason she loved the art program.

That was a pretty good program. Now that I’m looking back. And then in middle school it was also a pretty decent art program to very large space that we had equivalency of size. I would say maybe our two art education rooms put together. Um, and we would also work on a wide variety of things. We dug a little bit deeper into observational drawing and how to actually work with tone, um, more so obviously than elementary school. Um, but we did other projects as well. So it was never really pigeonholed into this is the only thing we’re doing. I feel like there was a project they specifically remember, um, like designing this whole head dress and things, and it was definitely culturally based even though that’s kind of all I remember about that one, though. (in-person interview, March 19, 2019)

CW remembered that he was very into art when he was in elementary school. CW’s parents gave him a lot of freedom and did not make him do any specific program, so he chose to do art because that was his natural proclivity. He paralleled his experience with his five-year-old daughter when he described his art learning experiences in his childhood. CW felt that children naturally love art in general.
I really liked the drawing. Um, I was a lot like my daughter when I was young [elementary school level]. I like to draw. What I would do is I would get, you know, like little plastic figures and try to draw them. And that was just kind of a natural thing that I wanted to do and I was good. (in-person interview, February 22, 2019)

Art was MP’s favorite class. One of the characteristics of the art class MP loved was exploration of multiple art media. In elementary school, MP’s art class focused more on 2D drawing, and in middle school, MP was able to explore 3D media. To her, spending time making the project was therapeutic and relaxing. The process of creating an artwork was like building a bond with someone, and she said she even felt sad if she missed art class.

I was in middle school at the time and that was when I really enjoyed art. I think that when you are in elementary school and it’s just kinda like, well, this is fun. We’re painting with our fingers and stuff like that. And then that’s it. But when I got into middle school, we did clay sculptures. We would get to bring them home, we would work on them and bring them home, um, and spend time on that. Especially like per semester, there would be one thing that we really, really worked on. And, um, I really enjoyed that. Like I really enjoyed making the clay sculpture. If I was missing school because I was sick, I was just sad because I couldn’t finish my sculpture... So I imagine when she [her daughter] gets to middle school it’ll be a little bit more than elementary school art. But still I think that, you know, it was really nice. (in-person interview, February 18, 2019)

Compared to SS, CW, and MP’s in-school art learning experiences, AR’s most memorable art learning experience took place outside of regular school classes. He attended a community art program in which he took a wood carving class. AR mentioned that his father also did many wood carving arts at home. AR connected his father’s works with his wood carving class, which made this art experience particularly meaningful and motivated him to find an out-of-school art program for his son.

When I was in middle school, um, they had like a county program where they would have different classes available to the community. A lot of times would have these courses in a high school or something. I took a woodcarving course. I was able to do a bunch of recurring, you learn how to carve like an old man’s face in a tree bark and that kind of thing. I did that. I really enjoyed it. I did other art classes, and we were looking for something for my kids. (in-person interview, February 16, 2019)
According to the parent-participants’ narratives, two main factors reinforced their interest in art when they were in K-12 school. First, providing multiple media and diverse topics as part of the art curriculum can motivate students to engage in art. Second, having a bond between personal memorable experiences and art productions makes art classes meaningful to individuals.

**Good Teacher Brings Good Learning Experience**

Some parent-participants addressed specific art teachers who influenced their learning experiences. According to their narratives, having a good art teacher affected their perspective of the art class and their interest in doing art.

CW mentioned his art teacher from elementary school, who had a unique personality, noting that her art classes were interesting and enjoyable. He also addressed that having a good teacher like her made him feel excited about the classes: “So, um, when I was in elementary school, uh, my art teacher’s name was, um, uh, Mrs. Simmons, and she was a very quirky lady, but I really liked her, and we did. I really liked our class” (in-person interview, February 22, 2019).

VG had an art teacher in junior high school who changed her negative view about making art. The art teacher encouraged VG and gave positive feedback that made her feel confident about her art. However, VG did not take other art classes after the teacher left. It was not easy to build trust with teachers because VG had previously had negative experiences with different art classes.

And then I did have one positive experience. It was required in seventh grade. When I went to junior high, I had to take one quarter of art and I really didn’t want to. And I remember the teacher said, ‘Oh, I’m a good teacher for people who hate art or don’t think they can do it.’ And I was like, why can’t do it? But she was really good, and she got me convinced I could do it. It was more like, oh no, just try like you can be good. And so, I
got positive feedback and I was happy, and I thought about taking art the next year, but that teacher left the school and then I didn’t want to have another teacher cause I’d had bad experiences as a kid. (in-person interview, March 29, 2019)

MG’s experiences with her art teachers were pretty positive, especially her art teacher in seventh grade. She mentioned that those art classes were enjoyable because the teacher created a positive learning environment and the lessons were engaging. However, compared to her positive experiences with the art teachers, MG’s elementary teacher created a negative impression because the teacher teased her in class. MG’s example shows that the way teachers use language can have a profound influence on students, even though it might be unintentional.

Um, well the elementary teacher is the one that made fun of me. She was my fifth-grade teacher, and I wasn’t fond of her. Um, but all my other ones I really enjoyed, and I enjoyed the art in elementary school. I really enjoyed my teacher in seventh or eighth grade. Whenever it was that I took art or maybe it was both, I don’t remember, but it was the same art teacher and then I really enjoyed the, uh, pottery teacher. So, I’d say it was all positive. It was good. (in-person interview, February 21, 2019)

CW, VG, and MG’s experiences show that art teachers play a significant role in shaping students’ learning experiences and their attitudes toward art. Creating a welcoming classroom environment, giving positive feedback, and encouraging exploration were vital characteristics they believed a good teacher should have.

**Monotonous Art Class/ Missing Art Class**

According to the parent-participants’ descriptions, monotonous art classes and/or not having art classes were major factors that negatively influenced their art learning experience in K-12. BG described the art class in her elementary school as unexciting and lacking diversity. Additionally, BG was an athlete and practice kept her busy. Because of her lack of interest in and motivation to do art, art gradually became her least favorite class in school.
I never chose to take art (laugh). Um, I’m trying to think…. Um, so we had art on a cart, and I remember the art teacher coming in every eight or nine weeks, and this would have been at the elementary level… I feel like as an elementary student, I remember in fourth grade when we were learning, um, States and capitals and the state bird, we had to just, we had to color, we had to color the state bird, the exact colors that we saw in the book. And, um, it was not open-ended at all... I do want to say that in high school art was my least favorite class. Yeah. Um (Laugh). Yeah. So, I’m just, I’m bad at it. I’m still bad at it. Um, we had to take a nine-week art course in high school, and I just remember, um, I had braces at the time and every time I had to go see my orthodontist, I wanted it during art class because that’s the class I wanted to miss. And thinking back on that, I, I don’t know why I didn’t have like a traumatizing experience. It just, you know, I remember all of the glass bottles with um, with the lamp reflecting down on it, and we had to draw this still life and it was, it was painful. (in-person interview, February 8, 2019)

BG mentioned that she did not have any traumatizing experiences doing art, but she still remembered an uninspired still-life drawing that made her want to escape from art class.

Although BG did not have an artistic background, she saw the value of art.

Like BG, VG did not have exciting art learning experiences. VG wanted to do art when she was in elementary school, but because she had a speech impediment, the school decided to use her art class time to have her go to speech therapy. Looking back, VG disagreed with how the school handled her case because her inclination and needs were ignored.

Oh I remember in elementary school really vividly because I was really mad because when I was in elementary school, especially the first part of elementary school, I had a speech impediment and I had to have speech therapy. And they always made me go to it during art cause they said, well, she doesn’t need an art. So I missed most of art for like the first few years. And then when I started, like I didn’t have to the speech therapy anymore, then I went to art. Um, they kept giving me “N” which means needs improvement. I’ll never forget this. And I was like upset and embarrassed by it. Um, and it never felt fair to me like as a kid. But then later as an adult, I still look back and I think, well that was kind of mean that they wouldn’t let me go to art. And I know this has changed now. They wouldn’t do that now. They would not say, Oh just because this child needs like therapy that we’re going to have them skip one subject at school. But I always felt like I couldn’t keep up. And so I got a very negative view of myself, like, Oh I can’t do it. (in-person interview, March 29, 2019)

VG still clearly remembered the reluctant and bitter feeling of being pulled out of art classes.

According to the parent-participants’ descriptions, two main factors negatively influenced
their art learning experiences in school. The first factor was the art class was monotonous and static and the content lacked excitement. Second, the art class was taken away from children because the school felt other activities were more important.

Attention to Art Declined

The reason the parent-participants stopped taking art classes or doing art differed from individual to individual. According to their narratives, two main factors resulted in the shift in interest. The first factor was a sense of competition leading to being conscious of the inadequacy of their technical skill. The second factor was the other interests and activities that distracted them from art.

BG mentioned that her sense of inadequacy gradually made her leave art. Making art was fun in elementary school because she did not feel the difference in technical skill/formal quality among her peers’ artwork or sense a competitive atmosphere among peers.

Um, and I think in those younger years I was more confident in my ability to do art. Um, I don’t think that at that age, at that time it, it felt competitive. It was a fun thing to do…Um, and I think my experience in high school, that nine-week course, um, I mean you’re older and you are able to analyze and your sense of self is different. And so when you’re looking at your project compared to someone else’s, there’s more of that competitive nature or feeling of inadequacy that you have as you view yourself against your peers. (in-person interview, February 8, 2019)

CW talked about a similar situation in that he enjoyed making art when he was in elementary school; however, the time he spent doing art declined when he entered middle school and high school because his interests and focuses changed. He felt that the motivation to create art tended to decrease when people got older.

Um, I was much better when I was probably 10 years old, you know. Um, so what’s going on? It’s because of the school. Yeah. I stopped, you know, I stopped… I was good enough to enjoy and be proud of the work that I did. Um, but after that, I never took an
art class. I didn’t go to a school that offered art classes and it’s kind of a shame, you know...art class, you know, like once a week through middle school, but for whatever reason, I think maybe athletics and some other things kind of got in the way. Um, I just didn’t put as much of an emphasis on it...when people get older or they, they don’t feel as motivated a lot, I think by being creative or painting or, I mean, some people do, but I think most of the people I know don’t. (in-person interview, February 22, 2019)

MP also shared that external factors occupied most of her time and resulted in stopping doing art. She chose Spanish as an elective course in high school because her family spoke Spanish. Also, she began exploring other interests and spending time on outside activities; consequently, she spent less time making art. However, art class was still her favorite subject, and she thought she might pursue art more if she eliminated other external factors.

I’m Hispanic, so I did take like a Spanish class just because I’ve been reading and writing and speaking Spanish for a long time, but I have a lot of family that speak Spanish. So, I did just do Spanish as my elective. And then I did a cooking class cause I love to cook too... If I could go back, I would still say that that’s [art] my favorite class... I mean, my art class, I loved my art class when I was in school. And I mean if I would’ve had that outside activity, I probably would’ve pursued art more. (in-person interview, February 18, 2019).

According to BG, CW, and MP’s narratives, they started focusing on and differentiating the formal quality of theirs and their peer’s artwork when they entered middle school and high school. This change created a sense of competition. Moreover, developing interests other than art, such as sports, was another reason for the shift in their focus.

Reexamining Internal Motivation for Creating Art

Some parent-participants shared their reflections about how their art experiences shaped their perspective of self. VG narrated how she re-recognized her internal motivation for creating art after she missed art classes for many years; CW shared he regretted discontinuing art. Because of being discouraged by previous art learning experiences, VG had a negative view of
herself doing art. In high school, she learned to sew, and textiles became her interest and one of her research foci today. VG’s research on and creation of textiles became the outlet for her artistic ability, which gradually changed the way she viewed herself and her perspective of art.

So I always thought myself as bad at art. But what I did do is I took instead, because you had to take something as I took a home economics and I like sewing. And so I think in the end that’s like what I did was I liked it [Art] too because I can totally sew clothes, I can do all that textile stuff. (in-person interview, March 29, 2019)

CW’s example seemed to be the opposite of VG’s experience. He mentioned that he loved doing art in elementary school and shared a story about how he unintentionally won an art award in fifth grade. He did not deliberately prepare for the competition, but the art award showed his talent in art.

But, you know, here’s a funny story. When I was in fifth grade, what people would do is they’d give awards to the fifth graders who had like, you know, the best, the best of math scores for five years. So, the best English scores for five years, and what ended up happening was, I didn’t know this until at the end of my elementary school career. Um, but there was going to be all these words and there was an art award, and I didn’t know it until I got second place at the end. (in-person interview, February 22, 2019)

Although winning an art award proved his artistic ability, CW still viewed his artwork as not good enough and believed he needed more improvement. He explained he could have made the art project better by taking this project more seriously. He felt it was unfortunate his high school did not offer art class, so he could not pursue it further.

I was in first up until the last art project where, uh we had to make, I think they’re called dream catchers. I thought it was pretty stupid. And so I blew it off, you know, and if I hadn’t blown it off, I would’ve been in first place. So I always look back at that art catcher and it was really a piece of garbage that I made. But I do wish I would have taken that a little more seriously. So I would have been first instead of second… My parents gave me a lot of freedom to decide what I wanted to do. And I, I think that I didn’t have the best way to value these things and a portion of my time when I was growing up. (in-person interview, February 22, 2019)

VG’s narratives showed how individuals can find an outlet to create, whereas CW’s
example described that external conditions did not support his aspirations for art although the aesthetic ability was still within him.

Influence of Peer Groups

The parents’ peer groups consisted of the parents’ direct, close, and core friend groups, including friends from work, family, and other social networks. The parent-participants closely and frequently interacted with the peer groups, which had an immediate influence on the parents.

Because MG did not rely on social media for getting information about programs and activities, she mainly received it from her close parent friends. MG and those friends talked very often, and those friends who were involved in social media groups or local organizations had various resources they shared with MG.

Because I know some parents they have a different, they have some, for example like parent’s group in terms of like social media group or the actual groups. So they have the morning handout with, or I’ve talk online are very often. I’m not a big technology fan or social media fan, so I definitely don’t go that direction. Although I know there’s a lot of information that would be easier if I just go on. Um, but my friends group for sure, like as they find out things I’m like, Oh I’m interested in that, let’s tell me more about that. And they’ll give me the information to do something that I wasn’t aware of. So definitely I found out different activities through them as well. So through friends who will be at one of the, uh, important associations that they can like pass out, let you know, different kinds of activities. (MG, in-person interview, February 21, 2019)

MW and JH had a solid and close friendship. They graduated from the same NIU program, and their children were the same ages. They always shared information and helped each other. MW mentioned that they shared the same values and parenting goals. Sometimes they would help each other by picking up their children from the art programs.

And I’ve got friends like JH that, you know, she’s in the same boat that she wants to allow her kids to experience different things and luckily we both have. Both my husband and I and JH, we have good jobs, and can actually afford to do some of these other things...I will say that we are friends and support each other. Um, but they’re busy too
(laugh). But like JH for instance, when Mirabelle [MW’s daughter] fell off the stairs, I just called her up because she was up here, or she was going to be coming up here to pick up Addie and stuff like that… I called her. I was like, hey JH, I need you to, um, I need you to pick up Anna, I need to keep reforming, she’s like, OK, what happened? And I told her real quick, it’s like, OK, don’t worry. I got her, you know, so I didn’t have to worry about it. Just here you go. And so she would drop anything for me. (MW, in-person interview, February 24, 2019)

MP’s case was different from MG’s and MW’s situations. Because MP was the first person who had a child in her peer groups, she did not have parent friends who could support each other. Additionally, she was very busy at work and did not spend much time socializing with friends. Her primary support system was her family, with whom she interacted most frequently. She also appreciated that her daughter’s preschool allowed parents to sit in, so she could observe how the teachers interacted with the children. However, while MP thought about becoming involved in the parent groups, she also felt she did not fit into the groups.

All my friends were still pretty young too, so I didn’t have that like the mommy group where we would all, you know, try to help each other. I think I was like one of the first ones [who has child] in my friends to ever have a kid and I was pretty young, so I didn’t really have that. I mean, I had the adults around me, you know, my mom’s friends, my mom, our family members, my aunts and stuff like that. But I never really, I think that’s why it was a little bit harder for me [parenting] because I didn’t have that. Um, she [her daughter] did go to like, um, preschool and kindergarten and I think that was really good for her. Um, I didn’t have any like parents there that I really talked to her, you know, but I just tried to involve myself. Her preschool did allow you to sit there also. So I think it was really helpful for me to just see how she was growing and interacting too with other kids and stuff...Again, I was pretty young so I didn’t say, Oh Hey, I’m depressed, so maybe I should go into one of these classes where these moms are all talking. Um, so I never really, I don’t think I looked too much into it. (in-person interview, February 18, 2019)

The peer groups directly influenced the parent-participants because those close friends were often the parents’ primary information and resource providers. Some of the peer groups came from a social network, and some were from school, work, or family. They played an essential role in supporting the parent-participants. Also, the participants’ parenting styles
influenced each other, directly or indirectly influencing their children’s learning experiences.

Microsystems Among Parents, Children, and Teachers

The microsystem refers to the setting where people engage in face-to-face interaction (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This study focuses on the microsystem between parents and their children at home and the parent-child-teacher dynamic in the out-of-school programs.

Descriptions of Parent-Child Dynamic at Home

According to the parent-participants’ narratives, there were three essential aspects of parent-child interaction: being present, listening and responding, and incorporating learning into interaction. The parent-participants agreed that parents’ presence is the key to parent-child interaction. Parent-child interaction did not necessarily mean parents and their children doing something together, and sometimes parents simply being present was a significant emotional support to their children. Additionally, to learn children’s needs by carefully listening to what children say helped parents make suitable plans to respond to their needs. Furthermore, taking advantage of appropriate events, including playing or having conversations, and turning them into meaningful and educational learning opportunities were important learning experiences for their children.

BG mentioned that learning through playing was her parenting style. She took advantage of different opportunities and made learning fun for her children, including doing homework. Additionally, she emphasized that spending time together and keeping her children company was necessary, even when cooking dinner.

I mean even in, in kindergarten, my daughter has homework, and we do those things
together. Um, we make learning a game. Um, even for my four-year-old, when we’re in the car and we’re making up silly rhymes and taking the opportunity to use moments to learn through play and fun. Yeah, having a time designated when we get home at night, you know, when I was at the table doing homework, mommy’s cooking dinner and, you know, we’re interacting and doing homework too. (in-person interview, February 8, 2019)

VG shared a similar thought regarding spending time with her children. VG’s younger child liked to bake and cook with VG, whereas the older child wanted VG to listen while sharing her thoughts. Although VG’s two children had different temperaments and requests, both of her children liked to have parents present while they were doing other things. VG also addressed that spending time with her children did not necessarily mean doing the same thing together; keeping each other company was the main reason.

The younger one loves to bake and cook, so she likes to do that with me. The older one is not very interested in that, but she likes things like she wants to me to sit with her while she tells me like what clothes she likes or what, like home furnishing she thinks are fun, you know, stuff like that. Um, we often will sit and read together. Um, maybe not read the same thing but near each other. Um, you know, eat dinner together, just hang out, stuff like that. (in-person interview, March 29, 2019)

MP shared her childhood experiences that influenced the interaction between her and her daughter. MP spent most of her time by herself when she was young because her parents were busy at work. She did not want her daughter to feel the same loneliness, so she supported her daughter’s interests and spent as much time as she could with her daughter.

So me and my brothers, we really just kind of spent a lot more time by ourselves. But I think that with me and Allie, it’s a little different just because I’m there. She’s my only one, so I can spend that time with her. You know, I get off work and she’s the only person I have to worry about, you know, so I can spend that time helping her with her homework and doing whatever she has going on, and make sure that it gets done. Um, and then if she has any, like anything that she wants to you to do, you know, I can look into that or try to help her get into something like that she wants to do, like whether it be art or dance or whatever. (in-person interview, February 18, 2019)

MP believed that parents being present is the key for parent-child interaction because it showed
parents’ encouragement and support. She addressed that sitting in the out-of-school art class and watching her daughter make art was also a good experience because she could see her daughter’s learning and creation process. Although she might not directly be involved in her child’s learning process, being there and watching her learn and grow was important to MP.

I mean, I’m not like necessarily interacting and helping her, but I get to be there and watch her. I think that’s a really good experience too. Even just sitting in the classroom and watching your own kid just kind of doing what they do, what they would normally do, like in a classroom, whereas you’re not in school with them, so you don’t really see. But here you get to see that and be a part of, you know, what they are creating. (in-person interview, February 18, 2019)

CH also mentioned the importance of spending time with children, including doing homework and making projects together. Moreover, she noticed her daughter wanted to try multiple art media because the school provided limited art media for exploration. She further took an active role to spontaneously engage in creating various art learning opportunities for her daughter.

My second grader, my oldest really likes the art teacher and likes what they do, but almost every project that they do is drawing with oil pastels. And so she can get frustrated that she doesn’t get to do anything else in class. Like she wants to play with the materials and try different techniques and things. So I actually, they have class parties for different things. So in the fall they had like right around Halloween time they had a fall class party, and they asked if a parent would be willing to do an activity with the kids. So I actually did a very simple print making activity because I felt like, well, at least they’ll get a chance to do something that’s not just drawing with oil pastels. (in-person interview, February 26, 2019)

To SS and her husband, being honest is the most important thing when interacting with children. Instead of letting children live in an unrealistic fairy tale, they believed that even children as young as five years old should know about the reality of society. She mentioned that her husband brought up a conversation about racism and discrimination in history and explained the contexts to their young children. Although those conversations might be too complicated to
be understood by children, her husband facilitated the complex discussion by breaking down the concepts into simpler ones and grounding them in the parent-child interaction and the art projects they did with their children.

We try to be as honest with our kids as possible, and not sugar coat or excessively protect them from truths. He takes it to a level, like at some point there was a whole conversation about Hitler over dinner and how that is what I’m saying it. Because my husband is Latino and so he’s a much darker brown skin person and so are my boys. Especially now with various racial tensions, and that’s a conversation that happens at least maybe like twice a week, just naturally. Um, and so my husband is trying to explain where that comes from and other moments in history that’s existed before...this is very impressive. But what I love about how he does it though is he does break it down to more simple concepts so that way it does. Even though those parts that I’m sure they do not understand, he’s still able to at least ground it into something that they do. So, he’s very good at that. (SS, in-person interview, March 19, 2019)

VG believed that rehearsing the concepts that children just learned from class can help with reinforcing learning. VG’s children were excited to show their work to VG when she came to pick them up at the out-of-school art program. VG often asked them to talk about their artwork and what they learned from the class to reinforce the learning experiences. To VG, interacting with her children by asking them about their artwork went beyond letting children express themselves because it can also encourage in-depth thinking.

The kids can show us and then they get to talk right away about what they did because I think that is key to what you’re talking about it...But if it’s right away and it’s all fresh, you know, I think it’s a way of learning it because then when the child tells the parent, look what I made, this is what I did. And you say, well, why did you make it that way? It’s like a way of like getting it into your child’s head. Like why they did what they did. (in-person interview, March 29, 2019)

VG also mentioned the exquisite corpse activity that the Saturday school offered on the last day in a previous semester. This was a parent-child art activity in which each participant took turns drawing on a sheet of paper, folding it to conceal the contribution, and then passing it to the next person for a further contribution. VG’s daughter enjoyed this art activity, and she did it with VG
at home afterward. Thus, VG felt having hands-on activities for both parents and their children could encourage parental involvement and parent-child interaction.

I think it’s worked best when they’ve done [completed art projects], like, I have activities on that last day that works well. Like I know we did something, um, my daughter loved it, which like making a monster, and there were three layers of paper, and one person makes a head and then you hand it to the next person and make the body. She liked that so much. She would want us to keep doing it at home. And then the parents did too. And then we were like, ‘Oh we see how this works. Like I think things like that it’s better to have a hands-on activity.’ (in-person interview, March 29, 2019)

Regarding the parent-participants’ narratives about essential aspects of parent-child interaction, being present, listening and responding, and incorporating learning into interactions were significant factors that helped to build positive parent-child interaction.

**Descriptions of Parent-Child-Teacher Dynamic in Art Class**

The dynamic among the parents, children, and teachers represented the microsystems in the art program. The parent-participants were invited to sit in the Saturday art classes. For the younger group class, the parents were welcome to be involved in the projects with their children. For the older groups, the parents tended to sit around the parents’ table and observe the teacher-student interactions.

MP was one of the parents who stayed in the room for the entire class period each week. MP commented that the teacher created a welcoming and safe environment in which the children were encouraged to explore different art media. She also praised the teachers’ classroom management strategies and the way the teacher patiently interacted with the children.

I think that the teacher was pretty spot on with everything. Um, she was very nice. You know, sometimes kids get a little out of hand. So, I think that the way she handled, like, all right, let’s sit down, you know, or we’re not using this right now, but we’re going to get to it in a minute. So, I think that everything, like how she handled it, she was very, very nice. And in the beginning, they’re coloring on the floor with the big sheet of paper
and she’s there doing that with them. Um, very encouraging. So, I think that was really nice. (in-person interview, February 18, 2019)

According to MP, the class teacher gave her daughter and her a warm and welcoming feeling, and the children in the class were also friendly to each other. MP also mentioned that how the teachers interacted with the students was very encouraging and positive, so the overall environment was accessible to students.

I mean for the most part I think it’s very welcoming. Um, the teacher was very welcoming, and the kids are really nice. It’s a really nice environment…Um, it’s pretty easy and self-explanatory to, um, get your kid in there. (in-person interview, February 18, 2019)

AR also had a very positive feeling about the overall instruction and class environment. He mentioned that the way the teacher delivered lessons and concepts was very constructive, which was the approach that his son needed to learn.

He [his son] has a good time doing it, I think the instructor is very nice and good with the kids and it’s a very, uh, positive, and I think it’s a good thing. like I was talking to this a little bit ago, I think what I’d like to have him eventually do is something that’s more like constructive. But I also think this is good because for example, I think like the print screening project is very constructive, so getting them acquainted with various styles and techniques I think is awesome. That’s a good, because I mean, to work in different mediums. (in-person interview, February 16, 2019)

The majority of the parent-participants had positive views about how the teachers interacted with the children, yet some parents had different opinions about specific class interactions. VG’s description of the teacher-student interactions was based on her daughter’s narratives. VG’s daughter was a returning student who had been in Art Express for several semesters, so she preferred to spend time doing art projects instead of listening to the teacher talk. VG also understood that it might be challenging for the teachers, as there were mixed new and returning students in the same class.

Well, I think, yeah, my daughter this semester was not crazy about how the class was run.
I think she didn’t, like she said there was too much talking. Like the teacher talked too much and didn’t let them do the art as much and she really wanted to do, and she didn’t like the talking and she also didn’t like the talking cause she already knows all of this. And I think it’s because she’d taken art express before and she was like, yeah I know this. And I think she was annoyed cause she’s like, well I’m older now, why don’t they stop telling me these things? I already know. And so she was kind of vexed by that and so, and I could kind of see her point like I think it’s probably hard because you probably have people who come in and then they just do it one semester and leave and that’s it. (in-person interview, March 29, 2019)

BG’s daughter was also a returning student, and BG was an NIU staff member, so she knew the teachers in the Saturday School were pre-service art teachers who were in training. She mentioned that because the parents were busy and tended to drop their children off and leave, it could be challenging to have parents engage in the class. BG had a positive feeling about inviting parents to stay in the class because this might be helpful to the parents who might want to reinforce the concepts their children were learning. The parents could practice the content at home with their children.

Um, and I feel like this semester that there have been some efforts to do that, um, because they’ve invited parents to sit in and perhaps participate. So I think that is a very positive move. Um, you know, parents are very busy and sometimes parents are just happy to drop their kids off to have some free time. So it’s hard to get parent involvement. Um, but I think that is important. And even if it’s like I said, getting that little handout that says, here’s what we did today, or ask your child about this project, or ask your child if they can define parallel lines because that’s what we talked about today, and reinforcing some of those things. Um, and I know that the teachers are very new in the clinical experience. (in-person interview, February 8, 2019)

Additionally, BG mentioned that the parents and their children felt welcome and safe being left in the classroom with the teachers.

CH had two children in different groups. She understood that the children in the younger group (four to five years old) needed the parents’ help to produce the artwork, but she did not anticipate it would be almost the entire class time. However, she also mentioned that her younger daughter seemed to like her parents around. Compared to the younger group, the parents’ role
tended to be more hands-off in the older group (six to eight years old). CH described that she and other parents were involved in the classroom, but she worked on keeping the art materials clean most of the time instead of participating.

So the two classrooms I feel like are very different, but I mean, that’s the nature of two different teachers designing their own lessons. So, I’ve found the younger class, um, feels much more, it seems like the expectation of the teacher in there is that parents are going to be there and help their kids the whole time, which is fine. Um, we weren’t totally anticipating that ahead of time, how much parent involvement there would be. It’s not a problem per se. Just we didn’t totally anticipate that in the class. The older kid class, there was one Saturday where I was fairly involved the whole time, but not actually with like helping my daughter do anything. I was cleaning materials so kids could keep using them because otherwise the instructor would have had to be at the sink the whole time because there wasn’t enough to go around. So, that Saturday I felt like I was really involved in that classroom but not actually in producing anything just in helping them to keep materials clean. Um, but yeah, in the younger class, it’s been very hands on where parents are helping the kids to create whatever it is that they’re making. Um, and my daughter in that class seems to really like that we’re there with her and working with her.

(in-person interview, February 26, 2019)

VG had a different thought about parents staying in the classroom. She commented that having parents participate in making art can encourage more parental involvement than sitting in the room and observing the class. She mentioned that even though some parents might choose not to intervene in the class and observe their children doing art in the room, she preferred to actively participate in the class, such as doing art projects with her children. VG also mentioned that another parent interested in art education and creation also wanted to be involved in the class interaction more.

The day I stayed, like I did help like with some stuff, but mostly I asked another parent, cause she’s a friend and she always stayed. She always will. It’s also because she’s very interested in that kind of education. So she kind of said, well what do you do? Like when you always stay? And she said, well mostly I just sit here and observe. Like there is not that much to do. And I guess for me it was like, well if I’m doing something with my child, to me that’s time well spent. But I think just sitting and watching it’s kind of like, oh it could be doing something better with my time. So maybe more like activities where the parents do something with a kid, that’s more like getting the parent to actually like do something, instead of just sort of passively watching the class, which I think some parents
will do that for sure. (in-person interview, March 29, 2019)

Some parents helped with clean-up, such as washing brushes, and MP was one of them.

MP mentioned her concern regarding parents involved in making art with their children. She noticed that some children felt more encouraged if their parents stayed in the room. On the other hand, the children might feel discouraged if they saw other children’s parents were there, but their parents were not. Therefore, if the teacher needed assistance from parents, then she was more than willing to help, but for most of the time, she tried not to intervene in the classroom interactions.

Let’s say my daughter was there and some, one of her friend’s parent wasn’t there. So I would say, you know, help them both or help whoever needed help. You know, I think that, cause I think too, that when, you know, it’s, it’s a little risky because some parents, you know, they just drop their kids off and they don’t, they don’t stay. So you don’t want the other kids to feel bad, you know. But I think that if you made it in a way where like even so maybe the parent maybe not helping their kid but helping another kid, um, but I, it’s, it is kind of risky to think about just cause, you know, you don’t want a kid sitting there like, oh well my mom didn’t come or my, my, my dad’s not here. (in-person interview, February 18, 2019)

The parent-participants had a positive view of teacher-student interactions in the art class and voluntarily helped with classroom clean-up. Some parents might expect to be able to engage in the art creation process with their children. In contrast, others tended not to intervene in the classroom dynamic because they felt it might be insensitive to the children whose parents were not in the room.

The parent-participants’ narratives about the program dynamic provided a different view of the teacher-student interaction. Overall, the parent-participants agreed that the art teachers created a welcoming learning environment, encouraged the students, and gave positive feedback. They also mentioned that the dynamics among teachers, students, and parents differed in each age group. In the younger group, parents tended to help produce the artwork; in the older group,
the children were more developed and did not need extra help, so the parents were more hands-off. The parent-participants also noticed that the children in the younger group seemed to like to work with their parents.

Parent-Participants’ Reflective Thought

The parent-participants’ reflective thoughts focused on six facets: description of their educational philosophy, perspectives of art, purposes for placing their children in out-of-school art programs, description of the art program, and description of their children’s art production. The parents’ educational philosophy was the core of their parenting style and influenced how they perceived art education, which influenced their intentions and purposes for selecting out-of-school art programs for their children. Moreover, the parents’ descriptions of the art program as well as the resources and challenges to participating in out-of-school art programs connected to how they described their children’s art productions.

Descriptions of Educational Philosophy

According to the parent-participants’ narratives, there were four major foci of their educational philosophy: encouraging exploration, being creative, being empathetic, and encouraging self-expression. The parents wanted their children to bravely and curiously explore different things and not be afraid of making mistakes. Exploration fosters a more flexible and open mindset that can help children to adapt to changes. Additionally, being creative contributes to gaining a problem-solving ability, which helps children confront and overcome challenges throughout their lives. Being empathetic allows children to make the world a better place.

CH reexamined the influences of her parents’ parenting style on her and on her
educational philosophy. According to CH’s narratives, her parents emphasized children’s academic performance and pushed CH to achieve their expectations, which influenced CH’s expectation for her children to have exemplary achievements both in- and out-of-school. However, CH’s parents’ expectations made her into a person who struggles with failure. She was aware that perfectionism made her apprehensive of trying new things because mistakes might occur when dealing with the unknown. CH did not want her children to experience the same difficulties. Therefore, she was more concerned about allowing her children to develop different interests, explore different activities and pastimes, and be happy about their pursuits.

I guess we want to support them in pursuing what they’re personally interested in, but not push them as performers where they feel like they have to do something, you know, to win awards or please us or achieve certain things. I guess that is maybe one difference between and more like a level of degree between me and my parents. Um, I felt like my parents really pushed me, umm, to achieve and we definitely want our kids to do well in school, to do well in their extracurricular activities too. But I try to be more focused on “are they happy doing these things” then “are they going to be amazing at whatever it is that they’re doing.” I guess a little bit more of a growth mindset. I personally feel that I grew up and still struggle with having a fixed mindset about, um, I mean anything that I was doing. And so it’s hard for me to try new things cause failures, like really a big issue for me. And I don’t want our daughters to feel like they have to be perfect at things where they can’t try them. Um, so yeah, I would say our big philosophy about school but about learning in general is we think education, lifelong education, is super important. Um, we want to push them to be their best but not have a lot of pressure about achievement, to have it be more, what are you interested in pursuing and exploring. (in-person interview, February 26, 2019)

VG had a similar view regarding children’s achievement in school. Aside from the importance of children’s learning in school, VG also emphasized that being an empathic person was another quality she wanted her children to have. VG mentioned that the way her parents treated people influenced her perspective regarding learning to be kind, which was embedded in her educational philosophy.

Well, I’m very big on like, school is important that they need to know. You have to get very seriously, you have to do homework...I would say education is like super important
to both my husband and I, and we definitely emphasize like they have to do very well, um, in school and things like that. And I guess I would say we emphasize they need to be kind to people because that’s really important to us...People just treat other people the way they would want to be treated. So, compassionate and empathy... I try to always be kind to other people like in general, I might just sort of like that, but I definitely think of all the way for them to learn to be kindness, to see me be kind. And I think that’s how I learned to be kind. My parents were very kind to people, um, and always treated everybody with dignity as much as I possibly could. And so I always tried to do that too. (in-person interview, March 29, 2019)

VG also addressed that the combination of demonstrating approaches and encouraging exploration is also vital to parenting. She believed that giving children the freedom to explore provided different channels for children to express themselves.

It’s good to give them freedom to figure something out. But in a way you have to show them how to do certain techniques, or they won’t figure it out themselves, right. So I think it has to be like a nice combination...giving them the freedom to actually express themselves. Cause I think it’s a good way, especially for kids who can’t speak very well. They can still express themselves cause when kids are little, I think they have a hard time putting into words how they feel. And so it can be good that way too. It’s like a different way to connect. (in-person interview, March 29, 2019)

CW mentioned that being kind and brave were the most important qualities he wanted his children to have. Being a virtuous human was the core of CW’s educational philosophy.

I really, uh, want my children to be kind, um, and, and brave... so those are the most, the most important things to us, I think...it’s hard being a human being. Yeah. Two things, uh, but I want them to, um, be virtuous human beings, you know, um, to be good. Uh, no matter what happens, the reason that, I’m having trouble talking is because I, uh, I acknowledge that they have a lot ahead of them. Um, but also I’m very proud of them. (in-person interview, February 22, 2019)

MP believed that being creative and artistic are vital because these qualities connect to self-identity. She also acknowledged the importance of the environment for developing a creative mindset. Exposing her daughter to an environment in which children do art together and inspire each other was beneficial to development.

I think that being creative is very important, and being an artist is very important because that comes from inside of you. So, I think that being able to put her into an environment
where she has a lot of other like kids and people her age that enjoy the same thing. I think that that’s really good for her. (in-person interview, February 18, 2019)

To BG, teaching her children to be good citizens and care about other people was the core of her education philosophy. She also stressed critical thinking and problem-solving abilities as essential competencies she wanted her children to acquire because those competencies would be with them throughout life. Additionally, BG mentioned that she wanted her children to explore new things and not be afraid of making mistakes.

I’m teaching my kids to, this is cliché, to be good citizens, to be good friends, to care about other people, to be thinkers and problem solvers... Um, but I feel like if I instill in them good values, um, that’s going to get them through life...because then there’s no question or there’s no wonder...Um, knowing that it’s okay to make mistakes. (in-person interview, February 8, 2019)

BG’s educational philosophy regarding encouraging exploration and not being afraid of making mistakes came from her own parenting experiences. BG reexamined her parenting approaches and shared her feeling that being a parent was a process of learning through mistakes. She believed that as a parent, she needed to constantly assess, analyze, and critique herself and her approaches. She also had to embrace the fact she was not perfect.

You don’t know until you find it. It’s true. But I think as a parent, a lot of times we blame ourselves so many times for things that, um, you know, don’t go right, we’re totally evaluating like, okay, if I would’ve done this different, would my child have done been this way. So I just think that part of being a parent is always kind of assessing and analyzing and critiquing and, you know, wondering how things could’ve been different if you would have done things differently. (in-person interview, February 8, 2019)

Seeing different parenting styles and the consequences in his family, AR believed that imposing rules on children was ineffective for establishing a positive parent-child relationship. Having children explore their interests and helping them pursue their interests was AR’s educational philosophy. According to his experiences and the observation of his children, he noticed that when his children loved to do something, their internal motivation would drive them
to be very focused and delve into the matters without any external reinforcement.

Because, you know, my thought is, the lessons that we learn on our own generally stick with us the most. And I remember my aunt and my cousin, my aunt would tell my cousin, “no sugar,” “no treats no this or that.” And they locked the pantry so she can’t have the sweets and the sugar and all that stuff. And then when she left her parents’ house, it was like go to time and like bam, bam, bam, bam, ice cream, treats, etc. Everything else, you know, like just no discipline...we try not to force them [AR’s children] because, and this is my feeling too, that if a child gravitates towards an interest, they’re more likely to pursue it with an intensity that we can’t give them if they really like it themselves. And if your parents always pushing us to something, at some point you’re going to rebel. So you just let them choose. (in-person interview, February 16, 2019)

Additionally, AR stressed being transparent about things was vital to parenting. To AR, telling the truth about reality instead of hiding the real situations from children allowed them to be more responsible and independent. He believed that even with young children, parents still had an obligation to honestly explain complicated topics.

We’re just trying to help them [AR’s children] become good people that take care of themselves. And I think the best thing you can do is be honest and try to provide guidance... We try to be empathetic and respectful to them and tell them why things to the art knowledge are happening and reason with them. But there are times when they are being difficult, you know, the kids, they rebel or whatever. Well, you have a choice, you can do this and face the consequences, or you can do this and it can go another way for you... I feel like there would be less of these compulsions and things that, and I think a lot of parents try to protect their kids by not telling them things. And I think that has to be done to some extent when they’re little but without lying. (in-person interview, February 16, 2019)

Being transparent and talking things out also connected to another vital component included in AR’s educational philosophy: communication. He shared his memory about his stepfather and how the family dynamic shaped his philosophy. He felt self-expression was the key to positive communication with others and that positive communication helped maintain a good balance of mental health. Thus, AR stressed that parents need to demonstrate positive communication by being open with their children, and he believed such interactions could encourage children to express themselves.
My stepfather was in Vietnam and he was a Marine. He wore the radio on his back and a lot of his friends died. He came back. Um, it seemed like he was okay, but later he had a flashback. He actually passed away like eight years ago, maybe longer. My brothers were still in high school. I was just in college at the time. It was devastating for our family. That was tough. But that’s the kind of thing, he bottled that up and he didn’t start going to counseling all kinds of stuff till after the fact. So I think maybe that kind of shaped some of our philosophy too, that you’re better off talking about things. And I think it’s holding its way or for examples important because it gives you a means to express yourself, to communicate, to share to other people. Um, and then good things you just, you know, and I just think it’s good to be a balanced, balanced person. So there’s times when you hold things within yourself for select types to share. But I think that if you have the approach as a parent to be open and provide reasons and hopefully that stays with them [his children] and they think about that, and hopefully art gives them a tool to express themselves too. (in-person interview, February 16, 2019)

In conclusion, the parent-participants’ educational philosophy encompassed four aspects: supporting exploration, being creative, being empathetic, and fostering self-expression. The parents encouraged their children to explore new things because it helped their children be more flexible and open-minded. Also, they believed being creative would foster their children’s problem-solving competency. Furthermore, they noted that empathy was an important quality for making an individual a virtuous human and contended that self-expression helped children’s well-being.

**Perspectives of Art**

The parent-participants’ perspectives of art included five facets: empowering self, developing valuable character traits, making life meaningful, improving communication, and developing an open mindset. They contended that art empowers individuals, especially young children, to explore new things and make their voices heard. Also, art helps people develop valuable character traits, such as perseverance, courage, and creativity. Art guides people to reexamine their self-identity and values and create meaning in life. Moreover, art helps
individuals express themselves and be more open-minded as well as contributes to embracing diversity, improving communication, and making the world a better place.

CH believed that exploration is part of children’s nature and children were naturally attracted by art and science because these subjects were inherently exploratory. Moreover, CH explained that art creation provides a sense of ownership and self-empowerment, which is another reason children love doing art.

But I also think kids just like to make stuff and experiment with things... I think art and science are kind of related in that way. So I think kids just naturally are drawn to [art], you know, and it’s part of it is. Kids don’t have a lot of control of their world, and so when you get to make something and create something, like you’re in charge of that thing. And so I think that kids are naturally drawn to that for that reason. (in-person interview, February 26, 2019)

CH also stressed that art education is important to children in the lower grades. CH believed young children should spend more time making and exploring various subjects and suggested that art serves a similar purpose. She realized that because academic work occupied children’s in-school learning, she had to find out-of-school art programs for her children.

Um, so I personally think that especially in the younger grade levels, it would be good to spend maybe slightly less time on academic work and more time on things like art. And I mean music is the same thing. They don’t get nearly enough music education. Um, I mean they spend the vast majority of the day is on math and reading. And I think especially in the lower grades, it’s good for students to have time to do other types of learning so that, so that they start to see you what they like to do too. Um, so I guess in that sense I don’t find it sufficient because I just think it’s seen as this extra thing. Um, I mean, part of the reason that we wanted to sign them up for Art Express was that we knew they have an interest in art. This would give them an outlet, um, to get more hands-on time to get more instruction, to use different types of materials. (in-person interview, February 26, 2019)

Although children love art creation, schools might not be able to satisfy their needs for different reasons, such as budget issues. From VG’s perspective, elementary schools should provide more art classes as art learning is vital to child development at young ages. VB also
believed that art, a non-standardized subject, should be promoted more as essential to elementary school level learning.

But in elementary school, I think especially around here [DeKalb], they have too little art for the students and they, really, they could do more. And I think it actually would be to their benefit because of course, you know, you can’t test on art. It’s not standardized testing. Um, but I think it’s still like important part of like elementary education and you know, they should be doing it more. (in-person interview, March 29, 2019)

CW believed art has intrinsic value for individuals and people enjoy having art in their life. He also recognized that many children love doing art but admitted that he knew very few adults who were doing it. He explained that when people got older, different things like jobs and other obligations might distract people from art. He felt that even though people knew the value of art, they chose to prioritize things that might not be necessary.

Um, I think there’s something intrinsically valuable about drawing or painting. Um, I don’t think that everyone should have to do it, you know, Um, but I do so think about how many kids like it and then, and then how many adults don’t do it. And I think it’s not because preferences have changed. Um, I think if we asked adults, “do you wish you had the space in your life to do this” I think most of them would say yes. Um, if there were, you know, a free art class, offered in the community, I think a lot of people would take it. Um, and I think it’s not so much about people not wanting to do it or not enjoying it, but because, uh, things crowded out, you know, get busy in a bad way, I have to do this well. Yeah, that’s, I mean that’s a lot of it and a lot of that stuff is necessary, but some of it’s not. And we can always make space for something that we think is valuable, but we don’t. (in-person interview, February 22, 2019)

Additionally, CW claimed that people were busy in unhealthy ways and were losing the channel to communicate the inner self. He mentioned that art could be a great approach to helping people reconnect to self and make their life more meaningful when facing the changes that new technology continuously shapes in our life structure. Moreover, CW believed that art allows people to develop valuable character traits, such as perseverance and courage. He used the example from the Saturday art program and commended how the art teacher structured the class so children were encouraged to bravely talk about their art. He saw the art learning experience
helped children develop valuable traits.

I mean it’s not crazy that in the not-too-distant future, robots will be doing most of the things that people get paid to do. And what are we going to feel fill our time with? Um, it might be the opportunity [for art]. Well, it’s, um, we need people to do something that they still think of as meaningful and being creative like this, even if it’s not producing something that anyone would buy, it can still be really meaningful. It seemed to me that it could be a value of art for people… it [Art] develops these character traits that I think that are really good for people like patients, a perseverance, you know, something doesn’t look right. You can try again. Um, really, really important things, uh, can take a while. Um, something like some virtue, like courage, you know, to create something is one thing, but the short to people, it’s kind of vulnerable. And so, I think, people have to be, uh, courageous, you know, So in that respect, I was proud of the students who could talk about their art. Um, that has to feel for a five-year-old, I would think incredibly vulnerable. (in-person interview, February 22, 2019)

AR believed that art helps develop a creative sense of self and the ability to express feelings. Also, he stressed the importance of being open-minded because life is a journey that consists of multilayered textures. Art helps people develop openness, which allows people to appreciate the richness of life.

But I think what art does is address those types of problems, not just drawing of poetry, the appreciation for sculpture, the ability to write, the creative sense of self, the ability to express how you feel about yourself, and the world. I think that’s valuable to keep yourself centered. I think it’s valuable to grow as a person, to become, to have something more interesting to say then who the bears are going to trade or whatever. Um, if you look at life, I think is a journey. And you look at, people may say, as you get older, maybe you’re not as strong. Maybe you’re more susceptible some days. Well, that may be true, but I would like to think that you grew up in different ways that you maybe appreciate some things more, that you realize that there’s many layers of depth. And I think art is one of those things that serves to really help people see the richness and the multilayered textures of life. So on a practical sense, I think it helps them to be more centric. Kids have never statistics to say that. It might guess that if you took somebody who appreciates or they at least have some, maybe they would skill higher on the openness spectrum, the big five personality traits that say, uh, and I believe openness serves you in all facets of your life. (AR, in-person interview, February 16, 2019)

AR also recognized that people do not value art as much as other programs. Compared to the easy accessibility of sports programs, he did not see many art programs available in the area. AR commented that it is a shame to see art marginalized. If more and more people are exposed to art
and develop the channel to express themselves, it can benefit people’s well-being and contribute to solving social issues.

So, I do see the arts being used, but for some reason it doesn’t seem like people value as much, you know. Cause if they did, I think you should see more programs like this [Art Express]. Whereas I can look up, I can go to any place in this country, throw a dart and they will have a sports curriculum and I have nothing against that. But there should be other things that should be something like this [art programs]. There should be levels of this and different opportunities for people to express themselves. And I think that’s just my opinion too. (AR, in-person interview, February 16, 2019)

AR further mentioned that art is a common language in every civilization and helps people communicate and appreciate each other. He believed that because art helps people be open-minded, cultural differences can be better recognized and appreciated. By embracing differences, people from different cultures and social contexts can cooperate and make the world a better place.

But I think a lot of the problems in the little that we have with other countries and civilizations, I think that art is one of the ways that people are able to communicate and appreciate what each other offer... there’s ties that I think the more people can appreciate each other, other cultures and differences, the less likely they are to go to war, the more likely you are to cooperate with each other, celebrate your differences and hopefully everybody wants. I don’t think that always works, but those are the kind of things that I think, um, on the very basic level from the child. (in-person interview, February 16, 2019)

The parents believed that art can empower young children to explore new things and express themselves. Additionally, they felt art helps people be perseverant, brave, and creative and makes their life more meaningful. Finally, art helps individuals be more open-minded, appreciate diversity, and better communicate and cooperate with others.

Intentions and Purposes of Selecting Out-of-School Art Program

According to the parent-participants’ narratives, there were two main reasons for placing
their children in out-of-school art programs: providing their children outlets for professional and structured art classes and free babysitting. Most parent-participants mentioned their children showed enthusiasm about doing art, and because the parents might not have professional art creation and instruction skills, they sought out-of-school art learning programs in which their children could structurally learn art. Other parents also mentioned that the Saturday School art program was a combination of quality art learning and free babysitting, and those were the reasons they placed their children in the art program.

MP placed her daughter in the Saturday School art program because her daughter showed great interest in doing art. To MP, helping her daughter explore everything she likes was a priority. Because MP did not have a chance to attend out-of-school programs to pursue her interests when she was a child, she did not want her daughter to feel the same limitation.

I want her to know that whatever it is that she wants to do, we’re going to make it happen because that’s important...I don’t want her to be limited and feel like when she grows up and feels like “I should done this or my mom should have done this for me or put me in soccer, put me in basketball.” So I say to her, you know, if there’s something you want to do, you tell me and what we’re going to look into it because even if you don’t like it, you’ve tried it and, um, we can go from there. So, I think that it’s important, you know, I mean, I know a lot of parents are like limited on finances and stuff, but I have the support from her dad financially and from, you know, my family financially. When it comes to Allie, she’s pretty spoiled. (in-person interview, February 18, 2019)

AR’s son also showed talent for and interest in doing art. One of the essential tasks parents should do, according to AR, is to support children in developing their talent. He also mentioned that Art Express was the only regular out-of-school art program in this area, so he felt it was a unique opportunity to fill his son’s need for art creation.

So it’s one of those things that I feel like, if a child has a talent in something, you know, just like to provide the outlet so that they can develop their gifts...if you’re interested, we’ll support you. So we’d like to do the same for him. And you know, there’s so many offerings for sports, there’s not as much for art, which was really cool about this place [Art Express] that they are recognizing that and filling that need. (in-person interview,
To find the right art program for his son, AR researched art classes in the community. He noticed some daycare center-affiliated art classes were available in this area. However, he sought a structured and art-focused program in which his son could learn art skills and concepts. He noted the art classes in daycare centers seemed more like a time filler. To AR, having a positive environment and providing structured learning content were two significant criteria when searching for out-of-school programs.

I think some places or some programs are more of daycare, almost are not teaching. We don’t gravitate towards that. I think some parents do because they, maybe they were looking for a time filler, but for us we really want it or we really want our kids to learn. So you know, combination of a positive environment and some place where they can learn something and then we just let them, we tried to keep them active and involved and we’re not going to push something on them, but we tell them they have to do something. (in-person interview, February 16, 2019)

BG had similar reasons for why she placed her daughter in an out-of-school art program. She searched for art programs because she needed an outlet for her daughter, who was creative and interested in doing art. According to BG, her daughter showed a tendency for art creation, but BG was not familiar with art instruction and could not fulfill her daughter’s need. Thus, BG placed her daughter in the Art Express program and exposed her to an art-rich learning environment.

I had to [place my daughter to an art program ]. Because my daughter is so naturally creative, I would be doing her a disservice if I didn’t give her that outlet. Um, she at home cuts everything. She cuts material and makes dresses for her Barbies. Um, she’s always been the child to use a lot of colors... um, I guess I was impressed by that because, you know, she was mixing her pinks and she was, I mean, she was like four when she drew that. Um, so, I just, I had to, because that’s her personality and that’s who she is. She’s always trying and making things and, and I can’t give her any type of instruction. Um, and so, just providing a place for her to learn and to grow. (in-person interview, February 8, 2019)

Although most parents mentioned the main reason for finding art programs for their
children was that their children showed talent or interest in art, MG had slightly different
reasons. Free babysitting was another reason MG placed her children in the art program. She
mentioned Art Express’s class fee was waived for NIU’s employees, and she believed her
children were safe and learning something in the program. Additionally, after she dropped her
children off in the class, she could take advantage of the two hours and efficiently get many
things done without distractions.

Free babysitting and then the chance for them to learn more art cause they like to do art,
and I don’t like messes so they could go do art somewhere else and you know, learn from
people who actually know what they’re doing in art. So those are the reasons. (in-person
interview, February 21, 2019)

Two primary purposes for placing children in out-of-school art programs were discussed:
providing outlets for professional and structured art classes and free babysitting. Some parent-
participants valued their children’s art learning experiences, so they wanted their children to
receive professional and structured art instruction instead of time-filler art classes. For other
parents, the Saturday school art program was a kind of free babysitting but also provided quality
art learning opportunities, which attracted parents who might need time to focus on getting some
business completed without being distracted by their children.

Descriptions of the Out-of-School Art Program

The parent-participants identified six main features about Art Express. The first was the
program creates a welcoming environment, which was the most frequently mentioned feature of
Art Express. The parents expressed how the teachers interacted with the children and parents and
made them feel warm and welcomed. Second, the art teachers encouraged the children to express
their feelings and explore different ideas. Third, the parents were impressed by the complexity of
the art curriculum, which incorporated different learning concepts or subjects into art creation. Fourth, the art program provided various art curricula tailored to children’s artistic and cognitive development. Fifth, the emphasis on the learning process helped both children and parents understand that every action and mistake they made was meaningful because those are the essential components of art production. The last feature was about connecting to and communicating with parents. The parents who stayed in the class learned some art-related concepts and experienced a different interaction with their children during the classes. The parent-participants also suggested communicating with parents about the curricula’s purposes and educational features of the art program, so parents could better understand the importance of learning art.

The parent-participants mentioned that the art program was a welcoming and encouraging learning place, and the teachers were all supportive and friendly to children and parents. As MP addressed, “The teacher was very welcoming, and the kids are really nice. It’s a, it’s a really nice environment” (in-person interview, February 18, 2019). SS also praised the art teachers for creating a warm and friendly environment by greeting everyone, sitting down with children, and drawing with them. She also mentioned that the teachers were patient with children and answered every question child asked.

And so it’s great to kind of walk into that environment [art class]. They’re [teachers] really sweet and kind and welcoming to our kids, and they give them patience when we’re tired of giving it. So that I’m sure is probably true for most patience. (in-person interview, March 19, 2019)

MP shared her observation of the class and commented that the teacher encouraged student expression. She mentioned that when the art teacher provided a set of colors and pictures and had students talk about what they think of those images, a student associated a picture with
death. At first, MP was concerned this conversation might scare her daughter or other children. But then she realized that those interpretations and dialogues were part of self-expression, and individuals’ feelings can be a broad spectrum, including negative connotations.

Um, I did notice though, like one of the little boys that was in the art class was kind of like, he was saying some like horrific stuff. He was just like something about, it was something about a picture, um, that they were talking about. And he’s like, yeah, something about if somebody died. And I was thinking, Oh my gosh, you know. But I mean when you look at a painting or you look at a picture, you know, that might be the first thing that comes to your head. So I think, as a mom, it kinda scares me cause I don’t want my daughter to get scared if somebody says something that sounds scary. But I think that it’s nice for kids to be able to open up, especially when it comes to art and save what they’re thinking, that what it feels like, whether it be a color or a picture. Um, so I think overall, it’s an really good experience. I mean the teacher was really nice. Um, it’s pretty easy and self-explanatory to get your kid in there. (in-person interview, February 18, 2019).

CH praised how the art teacher incorporated visual literacy into the art lesson and encouraged young children to think about the meaning of a picture outside the box. Also, an educator, CH understood that incorporation of visual literacy might be beyond four- to five-year-old children’s understanding, but those class activities and discussions allowed her to understand young children’s cognitive development better. Moreover, she noticed that because young children might not be able to fully understand the teachers’ instructions and explanations, their responses can be out of the blue but sometimes even more creative, and this characteristic was shown in their artwork.

I think I really like the approach that the teacher in the younger class. The teacher is trying to get the students to think about visual literacy and how things can represent other things. Four- and five-year-olds are so concrete as thinkers that understanding how something can be representational is just like beyond their capability. And it’s been really fun, funny and fun to see...And so I guess for me as a parent, as an educator, it’s fun to watch that process of like realizing, Oh, this is where four-year-olds are mentally, they are like not at this place where they can like make these big leaps, um, in terms of how things represent other things. And, but I think it’s also really good to push kids towards that too. So that’s been an, that’s been fun to watch, that kind of develop. And I also think there’s this thing, it’s still even happens with my daughter who’s seven and in the older
class, but definitely with younger kids where if you give them an example, they want to make the example because that’s in their mind like, Oh, that’s what you do. You use that exact thing. And be totally accepting of that. I’m like, that’s awesome if you want to make the same thing that I’m making, but also really encouraging them and trying to push them. (CH, in-person interview, February 26, 2019)

CW also observed the youngest group in the art program. He was impressed by how the art lesson focused on providing an outlet for creativity and increasing children’s empathy muscles. He praised how the teachers’ instruction emphasized listening to and appreciating others’ thoughts and feelings. He felt this was such an important skill to learn, especially for young children, and that integrating such concepts into art creation worked appropriately and perfectly.

I think it’s great. I’ve been really impressed. And one of the things I was impressed by was the emphasis, um, not just on being creative but being creative in a way that it looks like it’s meant to foster a kind of empathy. So, you know, the teacher would say that here’s some time to be creative, draw in the bubble, like all the things that you think are special to you and then, you know, let’s listen to one another, talk about these things. And um, it’s really neat because when you give students a job to do like that, uh, really only like, you know, for a given, uh, a picture that you get only the child who did it on that day at that time could have done it. And then if they have a chance to talk about it, um, where everyone has to listen and appreciate what’s special about the other person, other person, I think that’s really important. Um, so I was really impressed by that. I really liked that a lot. (in-person interview, February 22, 2019)

SS commented that the art program provided interdisciplinary curricula, the instructional pedagogies served different students’ needs, and fulfilled educational objectives. Aside from general art classes, SS addressed that adding supplemental art classes for students who want to pursue advanced lessons might be something the program can consider in the future.

I do feel the curriculum that you guys have been playing with does feed into other disciplines very nicely and feeds into creative thought process, which a lot of these kids are not going to be artists in the future. So, I do feel that it should remain the core. If there’s an option to also teach some supplemental drawing or painting classes that are more focused, that would be cool. (in-person interview, March 19, 2019)

Although SS and her husband had an art studio at home and did art projects with their children,
she believed having various art learning experiences would benefit her children’s development. She mentioned that Art Express’s art curriculum was developed according to children’s artistic and cognitive development and the lessons were tailored for different age groups. Because the educational aspect of the art curriculum was something SS might not be able to address appropriately at home, she commented that attending Art Express could help fill this gap.

Because there are so many things that they can do at home, so there’s no necessary to go to elsewhere. And that’s kinda my husband’s rationale. He’s like, we can easily do tons and tons of stuff here. I’m like, well, that’s true. But they still need an outside artistic experience besides us. Um, because we have the things that we do, but that’s still a small snippet of what they could be learning. And that’s another reason why I like to go to art express. The projects are tailored for the artistic development and mental development of a kid of that age. That’s cool. Whereas some of the stuff that we might do might be a little bit overshooting their age just because that’s what we also enjoy. And um, so I like the fact that they have a varied experience. (in-person interview, March 19, 2019)

CH noticed that the art teacher used different opportunities and turned them into learning moments, including accidental mistakes of using a medium in an unexpected way. She felt teachers using the teaching moments, such as making mistakes, was important because it helped children to learn the competencies of issue-recognition and problem-solving. CH also mentioned that how the teacher structured the art lesson was beyond her anticipation of an art lesson because the art curriculum involved both in-depth art and education practice.

The teacher was demonstrating first how to do it, and she did a couple of demonstrations, which I thought was good because it’s a new, totally new technique to most of them [printmaking]. Um, and you know, there’s multiple ways that you can use the plates. So I thought it was good that she was modeling that, but one of the prints that she took didn’t work, which I thought was great. I mean, I don’t think she planned it not to work, but it was I think really good for the kids to see that. Like, oh, I tried something, and it didn’t work. And then she talked to them about here’s what I think happened. I’m going to try to pull another print. And then she did it again and it did work the second time and she was able to talk to them about why it worked and why hadn’t worked the first time and talk to them about, you know, you just experiment with things and you never know what’s going to happen when you pull the paper off. Sometimes it looks great and sometimes it doesn’t and then you’d just have to kind of mess around with it. And I thought that was a really good teaching moment. Again, I don’t know that she planned it,
but she used it. (in-person interview, February 26, 2019)

SS addressed another advantage of placing her children in the out-of-school art program. She mentioned that parents might not be always patient with their children, especially when children make a mess while doing art. Also, having outside art learning experiences benefited children’s development because the art teachers were always patient with them and they got to experience different interpersonal interactions with the teachers and other children.

Uh, because even though we have artistic notion of how we create things and that we inherently give off to our kids, but we also parents and there’s points where I have no more patience for you. Um, you know, for this little child it’s like, Oh no, no, no [laugh]…Um, that is really wonderful is for them to have that experience because there are times where we are working on something with them and because they are our children, we might not be always as patient with something. Um, and not to be like snippy with them all the time, but just that there’s something to be said about having experience outside of your own parents because they behave differently. Um, they’re able to take in this experience in a different type of way. They may believe this other person more than they believe us as parents. Um, so yeah, from a parental standpoint, I really appreciate having this other outside experience. (in-person interview, March 19, 2019)

CH commented that having an art show on the last day was an excellent experience for young children. She explained that young children were proud of their artwork, and having their artwork be displayed reinforced a positive learning experience. Moreover, the out-of-school art program emphasized children’s art production, including their learning process, which her children’s in-school art class did not have. To CH, having children understand that the learning process was as important as their final productions was vital to education and parenting.

Um, and they also are at an age, I feel like in late elementary school, third, fourth, fifth grade, you start to reach the point where students recognize that what they produce isn’t what they can see up here. And then they start to not want to make art anymore. Cause it’s frustrating. They’re not at that stage yet. They’re really proud of everything that they make. And so, they’re excited about, you know, we’re having an art show at the end and we get to show what we’ve made, all of that. I think that’s really exciting. It’s not just work shoved in a folder and sent home, but it’s like, yes, you know, you have learned this much over this time, and you should be proud of what you’ve produced. So, all of that, I think, um, I feel like those things are missing from the type of art education that they get
at school. (in-person interview, February 26, 2019)

CH also addressed that her daughter enjoyed experiencing multiple art media in Art Express because the variety of art media was limited in her school. CH was satisfied to see how the Saturday School art program provided multidimensional art learning experiences to children, including concept learning, art technique skills learning, and self-expression.

My daughter in the older class loves that every week they’re using different materials, which is what I was saying about her class at school is just oil pastels. You know, every time they have art she’s gotten to do gel plate printing and they’ve done textures in clay and they’ve been doing a whole variety of different types of media and I think she is really happy about that because that’s what she was missing at school, was getting to play with techniques and materials. (in-person interview, February 26, 2019)

Furthermore, CH mentioned that attending the Saturday School art program benefited both her and her children. CH’s children were passionate about art creation, but CH did not have an art background, which made her feel limited when doing art at home with her children. Thus, the Saturday art program provided a place for her children to explore art and express themselves, an excellent experience for both her and her children.

Yeah, I think my favorite thing is the opportunity that it’s available. Um, if Art Express wasn’t a thing where, what would I do with my artist, you know, where would I take her? So just being an opportunity for children who are artistic and a place to go and a place to learn and express themselves. Um, so I’m thankful for the program. Um, I think it is a great experience. (in-person interview, February 26, 2019)

BG commented about the communication between the art program and families in the community. She felt the program should improve the advertising strategies so more families would know the program better. She stressed that many parents might still associate art classes with craft-making activities. Therefore, it was vital to communicate with parents about the learning objectives of the art curriculum and how art benefits child development.

But I also don’t feel like Art Express is advertised very much…I think that what’s important is the buy in for the parents. So, um, how do we help parents understand that,
um, art is important. How do we understand that? Um, art is more than making pretty things and there’s a lot more to learn through art in terms of creativity and problem solving so that it’s not just this cute pretty arts and crafts thing or actually, um, building like cognitive abilities. And so part of that is educating the parents on the importance of art and how it can benefit the child. Um, so that’s the buy in. I think that would change the way that parents view a program like art express. (BG, in-person interview, February 26, 2019)

BG further pointed out the importance of making connections between home and the art program. She mentioned that knowing more about what children learned from the art class allows parents to practice or reinforce the learning with their children at home and helps them retain the concepts. In addition, BG suggested that teachers can use different communication approaches to notify parents regarding the learning content and some suggested art activities parents can do with their children at home.

I think that as a parent I would like more on what really happens when my child is an, is Art Express. Because we know from research that, you know, students who go to school and come home and get that reinforcement at home learn more and they retain more. And so if I knew more about what was going on during art express, I can talk about it better. I can ask more questions, um, I could maybe do something similar at home. Um, so having that, that connection between home and art express, I think would for me really benefit, um, the interaction that I’m getting with my child and in terms of, of what’s going on there. Yeah. So even saying, if the teacher said to the parent, hey, you know, here’s a little newsletter, or just even a little half sheet, here’s a little paragraph about what we did today and here’s an activity that you can do at home to support that or to build on that experience. (in-person interview, February 8, 2019)

According to the parent-participants, the resources they took advantage of when placing their children in the out-of-school art program included school benefits for employees and family/friend support. The challenges to attend out-of-school programs included a low supply of art programs in the community and few programs available during the winter season.

To CH, the biggest challenge to participating in out-of-school programs was the weather. Because of the harsh winters in Northern Illinois, most outdoor activities and programs are not available. CH mentioned that Art Express was the only out-of-school program that was available
during the wintertime. Usually, fall was a busy time for families because the weather is pleasant, and many outdoor activities were available in the community. The conflict of different programs’ schedules became another challenge to parents, especially Saturday afternoon.

Um, so in the winter here in Northern Illinois, there is nothing to do. So we thought we didn’t sign them up for it in the fall because the weather’s still good and we thought we should be outside while we can be outside. But in February and March, you might as well spend the afternoon making art because what else can you do? Um, it’s so cold and horrible. So that’s part of the reason, um, the structure of the program that if you are faculty at NIU, then you just pay the registration fee. Um, and we already pay the registration fee because our daughters take music lessons. So it’s like a free class for them basically. Um, yeah, I mean those are factors. The biggest factor was we knew that they would love taking an art class. That’s the big reason. (CH, in-person interview, February 26, 2019)

CW also mentioned the free art class benefit for NIU employees. To him, having the art class fee waived was appealing. Additionally, he talked about the challenges for families doing programs outside of school, including limited programs available and the cost of attending programs.

We knew it was free, which was a big selling point and we knew that it was just a very well put together program…She really loves art. She does art at home almost every day. And uh, there are only so many programs around town that we can do. So, you know, she does swimming. She does soccer and we changed these things seasonally. Uh, but there aren’t very many affordable programs that have to do with the arts, like art and music. And so, um, having a free program at the university, it’s a very appealing. (in-person interview, February 22, 2019)

CW agreed that winter was always challenging for parents to find programs or activities for their children. Moreover, CW mentioned that when children were in the out-of-school art program, parents can take advantage of the time to do something else, which has been helpful to him.

When you have young children is to get exercise and to have them get exercise and to have a place to go where, you know, you can take them to get exercise when it’s really cold outside or where you can get exercise and have someone else watch your kids for an hour. It’s a life saver. (in-person interview, February 22, 2019)

Support from families and friends was another resource for the parents. MP mentioned
that she learned about Art Express from her mother’s friend, who also paid the class fee for MP’s daughter. MP said this friend searched for art classes in the region and found Art Express.

Um, actually my daughter, she loves art, so I mean she loves coloring and stuff and just everything that has to do with art and she’s so creative. So I wanted to put her in something, but I hadn’t really researched anything and I knew I wasn’t sure of anything like that. Um, and my mom’s friend just searched art classes, um, near me and that art express was one of the first ones to pop up. And so she looked at it and she actually wanted to put my daughter in there. Um, for a semester for like a month or whatever, just to see like how she would like it. So then she would continue like paying for her to go there. Um, so yeah, I found out through my mom’s friend actually. (in-person interview, February 18, 2019)

The university offering a free Saturday school art program was a beneficial resource to the parents who were employees or students. For other parents from the community, social support, such as financial or informational support from their family or friends, was another resource the parents considered when placing their children in the art program. On the other hand, the parents’ challenges included few programs being available during the winter season, and Art Express was the only regular out-of-school art program in the community.

The parent-participants described six main features of Art Express, including creating a welcoming environment, encouraging expression and innovative ideas, providing interdisciplinary art curricula, incorporating children’s artistic and cognitive development, emphasizing the learning process, and connecting/communicating with parents. Overall, the parent-participants held positive perspectives about the art curriculum, instruction, and environment in the Saturday School art program.

Descriptions of Children’s Art Productions

The parent-participants shared their negative and positive observations about their children’s reactions to the art projects. The parents talked about their children’s art learning
experiences as well as the possible factors that might influence their children’s experiences.

BG’s daughter had attended Art Express for several semesters. She noticed that young children might not be able to understand the purpose of breaking down a big art project into several small projects and might get bored with repetitive procedures. Also, young children seemed to be inclined to having a different and completed artwork every Saturday because they could show the work to their parents right away and receive immediate feedback.

Um, I think her struggle is, it was too many weeks to be working on the same thing. Um, you know, they did the floor plan or the blueprint and then they were able to make their house. And I think every week they kind of worked on a different room. Um, and I think for a child that young, um, it was a really long time to see the final product. Um, and I think that’s part of the reason she struggled through that. (BG, in-person interview, February 8, 2019)

SS shared both she and her son’s favorite art project was the magic cupcake recipe book. This project consisted of several small projects and eventually was assembled into the 3D recipe book. This art curriculum was similar to the house-making curriculum that BG mentioned above because both curricula aimed to create a large-scale final art project. SS said that her son enjoyed this art project because the theme happened to be one of his interests and the project included using different 2D and 3D art media. Also, the teachers incorporated various activities and stories into the art creation process to motivate the students. The art exhibition on the last day was also memorable for SS and her son because the parents and their children were able to walk around, see every groups’ art productions, and interact with other families. Hence, SS expressed that her son had a very positive art learning experience that semester.

My favorite was probably the project Liam was working on that had the recipe book. And again, the multifaceted aspect of it, like that love, love, love. Um, but you really got to see how thoughtful the whole process was at the last day, you know, and we have the big celebration and we’re looking at everyone’s stuff and being able to see all the different age groups and what they’re working on and how interesting and well thought out all of these lessons were. And like attending the little theatrical production, which is really fun,
you know. And um, again, it’s like, it’s not just one definition of what teaching art should be, really was very different for all of these different age groups. And that was exciting. That was a wonderful reminder on how dynamic this actually is. So that was definitely one of my favorites, like something that stands out is why it was my favorite. (in-person interview, March 19, 2019)

To VG and her daughters, the most special art project was the wearable art project. VG had been researching textiles and had different textile collections at home. VG and her daughter did different textiles-related projects at home, and the wearable project happened to be a theme they both liked. VG mentioned that having the fashion show on the last day was the highlight of the learning process to both of her daughters because every student had a chance to show their costumes to all the participants.

Yeah, there was a semester as great when both my kids were in it and they made wearable art and they had a fashion show that was like, that totally stands out. That one was like a particularly amazing one because we were like in an auditorium and the kids came in and they were wearing what they made and it was really neat... that was very memorable. Um, and it’s funny because I just ran across one of the pieces of the wearable art because it’s also something they made in, they brought him in, they played with it, whereas a lot of the other stuff sometimes, um, you know, some of it we’ve kept very carefully, like in a portfolio and other stuff, maybe not so much. But that one was interesting because they actually, they played with it and kind of destroyed it by playing with it. But, so that was also like, it had an afterlife too, which kept the memory of life. (in-person interview, March 29, 2019)

Additionally, VG said her daughters loved the costumes and often played with them at home. Therefore, the wearable art project was the most memorable art learning experience to VG and her daughters.

Summary

This chapter discussed the parent-participants’ contexts and experiences when placing their children in NIU’s Art Express, DeKalb. The parents’ context referred to their exosystem and mesosystem, focusing on their social systems, art-related experiences, and peer groups.
Analyzing the parents’ social systems – including the community in which they live, educational attainment, social networks, and work experiences – allowed me to draw out how those external factors influenced their perspective of art. Additionally, the parents’ descriptions of their mesosystem consisted of their previous art experiences and peer groups, which directly shaped their perception of learning art and influenced their educational decision-making processes.

The parent-participants’ experiences of placing their children in NIU’s Art Express included the interpersonal dynamic at home and within the art program as well as their reflective thoughts about their children’s art learning experiences. The parent-participants’ reflective thoughts were an in-depth reflection of being parents and their out-of-school art program-related experiences, including their educational philosophy, perspectives of art, purposes of placing their children in Art Express, descriptions of the art program, and description of their children’s art productions. The parents’ descriptions of the microsystems and their reflective thoughts represented the internal factors, intertwining with the external factors and further constituting the parent-participants’ authentic experiences and perceptions of art education.
CHAPTER 5

CHILDREN’S ART CAMP AND MAGIC POWER OF ART PROGRAM, TAIPEI

Exosystem

The exosystem includes community structures, parents’ educational attainment, parents’ social networks, and parents’ workplaces or work. In the following sections, I analyze the parent-participants’ exosystem at the second research site (Children’s Art Camp and Magic Power of Art Program, Taipei), including the parent-participants’ perspectives of the community in which they live, the influences of their educational attainment, their descriptions of their social networks, their perspectives of the educational system, and the influences of their work experiences.

The participants described that families had the advantage of accessing great quantity and quality of out-of-school programs in Taipei. When selecting out-of-school programs, the participants identified their educational backgrounds and working experiences as critical factors that influenced their parenting approaches and decision-making. Aside from these factors, the participants’ social networks influenced how they received information and shaped their perspectives. Social media was the primary platform connecting their social networks. Moreover, the dominant discourse of emphasizing academic performance in the educational system influenced parents’ educational resource allocation and the preferred characteristics of out-of-school programs.
Perspectives of the Community

The participants’ descriptions of the city or town in which they currently live are important artifacts that reflect their daily lives, experiences, and exosystem. All the parent-participants lived in the Taipei metropolitan area, which includes Taipei City, New Taipei City and Keelung City. Among the 12 participants, 10 lived in Taipei City and two lived in New Taipei City. According to the statistics (Taipei City Government, 2020e), the numbers of art-related out-of-school programs in the Taipei metropolitan area were Taipei City: 110, New Taipei City: 115, and Keelung City: 6.

Families who live in the Taipei metropolitan area have access to a myriad of educational resources because of the structure of the cities. Taipei is the capital city of Taiwan, and it has a convenient public transport system, which is a critical factor that impacts accessibility to out-of-school art programs. Like many parents in the area, SH and ZL mainly relied on public transportation for taking their children to classes and events. Additionally, the high density of out-of-school programs in the area provided various options for families.

I feel convenient and safe public transportation is vital, and I think Taipei checked that box. Um, also, there are many facilities nearby. This is extremely important to parents, um, so are out-of-school programs, and they [out-of-school programs] are all very close to each other, like in the district I live, there are many options. (SH, in-person interview, July 15, 2019)

Living in Taipei is so convenient, like there are so many art programs in this area. Um, also like parks and other facilities for family, we take advantage of those a lot. Um, MRT [Taipei Mass Rapid Transit] is essential to the city for sure. It is so convenient, and we can take our kids to the zoo, museums, literally everywhere, without worrying about traffic and parking. (ZL, in-person interview, July 17, 2019)

Both SH and ZL mentioned that living in Taipei gives them the privilege of easy accessibility to educational and recreational resources, which was important to the parents who emphasized
learning experiences. As JL described, Taipei has abundant resources, so parents can easily find suitable and affordable programs for their children.

Kids have tons of resources here [Taipei], they can do lots of things, and of course, because in Taipei there are so many events and programs, you can find high-end or free programs, all kinds of themes and options, you name it. (JL, in-person interview, July 11, 2019)

On the other hand, living in Taipei can also be stressful for parents because of the competitive culture of children’s academic performance and learning achievement among parents’ groups. JL mentioned that it is common to see a child of elementary school age attend several out-of-school programs, such as music, art, sports, languages, and academic subjects. JL explained that attending out-of-school programs was supposed to be an optional learning opportunity for families, but it has been embedded into many parents’ developmental and learning plans for their children due to the peer pressure among parents. She also addressed that the stress of needing to attend several programs can create a financial burden for many parents and a learning burden for children.

So, in Taipei, if you are from a wealthy family, you can hire a private coach or tutor, or attend all kinds of programs you prefer. If you are from an average household, it might be a burden to have your kid go to many programs. But the problem is, everyone goes to art programs, music programs, learning English, um, I mean, those programs should be extra, like not essential or optional, but now if you don’t have your kid enroll in all kinds of programs, it seems strange to everyone. (JL, in-person interview, July 11, 2019)

Like JL’s experiences, IC shared that sometimes she felt stressed and anxious when she overheard other parents talking about their parenting strategies and the programs their children were attending. Although IC disagreed with filling children’s time with various out-of-school programs, those parents’ conversations still made her occasionally question her own approach.

When I go pick up my kids, there are some parents in the waiting room and chatting, and I often overhear them talking about parenting, school, programs, oh boy, it makes me so stressed out. And, sometimes I’m like, am I doing it right? But, you know, I don’t think
that is the best for my kids. (IC, in-person interview, July 12, 2019)

Additionally, SH pointed out that aside from out-of-school programs focused on school subjects, parents in Taipei tended to place their children in programs aimed at learning musical instruments because of schools’ expectations. According to SH, learning more than one musical instrument was a common requirement in many private elementary schools in Taipei. Additionally, attending schools’ string orchestra was a popular choice in public schools. In other words, the schools’ structures and foci directly influenced some parents’ decision-making regarding out-of-school programs.

Um, in Taipei, many private schools require kids to learn how to play piano and one other instrument, so they have to know how to play at least two musical instruments. And, so, even like in public school, many of them have string orchestra, so parents often let their kids take music lessons outside of school, umm, oh, and English and math classes, so you can see, those classes almost occupy children’s time. (SH, in-person interview, July 15, 2019)

There were many popular school districts in Taipei, and SY lived in one of the most competitive districts. She mentioned that children in her daughter’s class commonly attended several out-of-school programs during a semester because the parents in this district valued and emphasized their children’s education.

I feel the parents here highly value education. I think it is also because of the district, um, we live in a very popular district and many parents want to send their kids to the schools here. Um, I think because of that, I see almost every kid in my daughter’s class attends several programs in a week, um more than we do, like, they learn everything, all kinds of programs you can think of, and that is a common situation across every school class. (SY, in-person interview, July 18, 2019)

Overall, the parent-participants agreed that living in Taipei provided better access to educational resources. Aside from having a high quantity of out-of-school programs in a metropolitan area, the efficient public transportation in Taipei is part of the community structure, which was an essential component of the parent-participants’ exosystem. Several participants
mentioned the Taipei Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) contributed to the accessibility to out-of-school programs. Additionally, the high demand for out-of-school learning seemed to be the culture among many parent-groups, impacting the increased supply of out-of-school programs in Taipei. From the parent-participants’ perspectives, the high density of out-of-school programs in the communities benefited them because they could choose the programs that suited their needs the best without compromising their family and work schedules.

Influences of Educational Attainment

Individuals’ educational background, such as parenting and education philosophy, was an essential part of their cultural capital that shaped their values (Bourdieu, 1984). Parents’ education-related or art-related degrees or experiences are important factors that influence their cultural capital. At the Taiwanese research site, many of the parent-participants had an education-related degree or work experience, and this characteristic became an exosystem factor that significantly impacted the analysis of parents’ narratives in this study.

JL was trained as a clinical psychologist, and her knowledge about child development helped her understand her daughter’s behavior and emotions better. Moreover, JL’s experiences working with teachers and their students with special needs across many schools allowed her to be more sensitive to her daughter’s development and struggles. Therefore, JL was able to intervene when needed.

Because this is my expertise, I know what is bothering her. For example, if she’s hungry, she might act impatient, so I won’t blame her. Also, her fine motor skills development is a bit slow, and it couldn’t catch up with the standards, so she gets frustrated easily. Like, she would say her drawings don’t look the way she wanted, and I noticed that. So I do an art project with her sometimes, and I happened to know this art program and the teacher is a friend’s friend. I communicated with the teacher about my daughter’s situation. So in the class, the teacher would pay attention to this and give her extra assistance. You know,
if I was the one who helped or taught her, she might feel embarrassed because she tends to think that me helping her is because she didn’t do it well enough. Even though the teacher and I might teach her the same thing, her reactions are different, so I think it would be better if I let the teacher guide her and teach her those skills. (JL, in-person interview, July 11, 2019)

ML learned child development at school and believed it is essential to keep learning about the new studies and discoveries in the field to understand her children’s generation’s needs. She mentioned that social changes also impacted people’s perspectives of education and parenting, so she must push herself to be open-minded and learn new perspectives.

Because I specialize in child development-related fields, I learned a lot about it in school. But when it comes to practicality, I have to keep following what is new, knowing what is important to their generation and what is changing in society. Just keep learning; otherwise, it would be difficult for me to grasp what challenges they are facing. I also need to change my mindset accordingly, especially the information from other fields. (ML, in-person interview, July 14, 2019)

KY earned a degree in photography, which impacted the way she saw the daily visual spectacle. She believed that individuals’ aesthetic sense can make their lives vigorous, and she also applied this perspective into her parenting style.

If they [her children] can appreciate the beauty of everything, their lives will be full of interests. It doesn’t matter where they are, or perhaps they are sitting at a corner, they can always notice exciting or beautiful things. I guess I don’t like kids who are whining about being bored because I think if they got bored, that was because they didn’t see the interesting aspects of an object. Um, I guess it might be because I was a photography major, so I’m observant of the environment. (KY, in-person interview, July 17, 2019)

Parents who have an art-related background also directly impact their children’s art learning experiences. ZL was an engineer, and he earned a degree in information technology. According to ZL, although art was not ZL’s specialty, his wife was an art major in school and that directly influenced their child’s art learning experiences at home. Moreover, when his wife was drawing with their daughter, she often emphasized the details of the artwork.

My wife is an art teacher, so she always reminds my daughter of the details when she is
 Individuals’ parenting styles and approaches are impacted by their previous learning experiences, and their expertise was one of the important factors that shaped how they interacted with their children. The parent-participants who had educational or art backgrounds were likely to be more sensitive about their children’s developmental and artistic needs. Further, they applied the knowledge to their educational approaches and perspectives. In other words, the parent-participants’ narratives showed that their educational backgrounds influenced their parenting and decision making about their children’s learning.

**Descriptions of Social Networks**

The rapid and abundant influx of information shaped parents’ social networks. Parents gain information about parenting, programs, and special events for families through the internet, social media, traditional media, books, and virtual/in-person friends.

As an essential part of parents’ social networks, social media was a popular and common platform for sharing and receiving information. Posting the classes children attended and the events for families on social media was a routine for some parents, and learning about out-of-school programs through other parents’ experiences on the Internet or social media seemed to be a primary method of information spreading. According to IC, some parents were keen on bringing their children to all kinds of programs and activities, and IC said they learned about those events by viewing their social media pages.

One of my daughter’s friends, her mom was in a parent’s group and posted that they are keen on attending all kinds of events, programs, and activities because they want to
enrich their kids’ everyday life…they are very engaged, and I see them post pictures of the events every weekend. Literally every event, hiking, art exhibition, music concert, workshops, you name it. (IC, in-person interview, July 12, 2019)

SL learned about the out-of-school art program from a friend’s social media post, and JL also saw a video of the art class on social media and decided to register her children in the art program.

A friend of mine, her kids are homeschooling. They usually share various information about out-of-school programs on their Facebook, and I saw this the art program, so I thought, um, maybe I can give a try. (SL, in-person interview, July 22, 2019)

I think I saw someone on Facebook shared some clips of this art teacher’s teaching. So, I checked their website and found out that they happen to be in Taipei, so I registered the class for my kids…you know kids love to listen to stories, and they are so excited about it. Also, the teachers won’t require them to draw in a particular way. (JL, in-person interview, July 11, 2019)

Although information spreading on social media can sometimes be useful and convenient for some parents, negative consequences were also evident. SY addressed that over relying on social media can make parenting stressful because people like to make comments and give advice on social media, including to strangers. SY further explained that parents have different parenting styles and they tended to argue the efficacy of different approaches. SY noted that this situation might make other parents uncomfortable.

It seems to me that everyone loves to share information right away in the groups [social media groups], and they tend to give feedback or suggestions to everyone. Um, actually, the peer pressure among parents can sometimes make people stressed. Like, everyone has different parenting styles, but everyone thinks their approaches are the best. (SY, in-person interview, July 9, 2019)

IC had a similar thought about the dynamic of parents’ social media groups. According to IC’s observation, most of the parents in Taipei had their own parenting philosophy, which consisted of their experiences and what they saw on the Internet or their social media group. In
other words, parents’ social networks, including intimate and direct peer groups and indirect social interactions, played a significant role that shapes their viewpoints of parenting.

I feel there are many types of parents, and their parenting styles don’t necessarily relate to their social-economic status. Some parents tend to be more hands-off, and others tend to be very involved…there are many parents in Taipei, um, who have very strong opinions about their parenting approaches. But those are personal opinions that might be impacted by their personal experiences, and these opinions might not be in line with the overall ideology. Their perspectives might have personal logic, but many of them learned the perspectives from parenting-related articles on the Internet, or sometimes it might be because of their learning experiences. Also, their social groups can play a significant role, like the groups’ characteristics. (IC, in-person interview, July 12, 2019)

On the other hand, parents like JL who had access to professionals in her workplace were more likely to carefully process the information from social media groups. JL learned information about out-of-school programs and events from all kinds of places. For example, she joined many social media groups in which parents shared information about parenting and programming. Although JL was not a very active member of the social media groups, she had friends and coworkers to talk to and consult with.

Sometimes I learned it [programs’ information] from the Internet, sometimes from friends, sometimes I happened to see the information from bookstores. So, I would try it…those mom’s social media groups are a great platform for seeking programs’ information, but I don’t get involved in the groups a lot. Also, because I have coworkers and friends and their children are similar ages to my kids, I would ask them about it [programs]. (JL, in-person interview, July 11, 2019)

JL addressed that sometimes the immense amount of information on the internet and social media can overwhelm parents, thereby making the selection of suitable and helpful educational resources for children challenging. Thus, she tended to take advice from her coworkers because they were specialists in child development and psychology.

My coworkers’ specialties are all child development-related, and we need to discuss cases and also complain about spouses sometimes [laugh], so, I would ask them about some parenting issues that I might have, like discipline, and the colleagues who have developmental psychology backgrounds would give suggestions about the factors that
might influence children’s development. So, I will listen and see what I can do. Because they are experts, the information they provide should be reliable. Even with the same background, sometimes they might have different opinions. I think it is good to share and discuss because everyone has their own blind points. (JL, in-person interview, July 11, 2019)

According to the parent-participants’ narratives, their social network was across workplaces, peer groups from school, parent groups from children’s school, and social media groups. The participants learned about parenting, community events, programs, and activities from their social networks. Social media functioned as a hub of the participants’ social networks because it was not only a platform for finding information but also connecting the participants with their social networks. In other words, the participants relied on social media to discuss, communicate, and share information with close friends, colleagues, and other parents. According to the participants’ experiences, social media was a dominant information distribution agent that shaped the nature of the participants’ social networks and their decision-making. They also brought up the issue of the selection of reliable information, which was a side product of social media-centric social networks.

**Perspectives of Educational System**

The participants’ perspectives of the educational system included three foci. The first was about the P-16\(^1\) school system. There are two standardized tests in P-16 in Taiwan. The first standardized test is the Comprehensive Assessment Program for Junior High School Students (CAP). CAP is an exam for junior high and middle school students before going to high school or vocational school in Taiwan. The second standardized test is the General Scholastic Ability

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\(^1\) P-16 refers to education ranging from the beginning of preschool to the end of a four-year college degree.
Test (GSAT), used for university admissions in Taiwan, equivalent to the American College Test (ACT) in the United States. According to the participants, these two tests directed the educational system and shaped schools’ structures as well as influenced parents’ parenting perspectives. Children’s academic performance in school tended to occupy the dominant discourse in the middle and high school stages. Although all the participants had experienced the standardized tests and realized this dominant conception might undermine children’s development of interests, they had to compromise based on the reality of the situation and find a way to balance the actual educational system with their ideal education philosophy.

One of the participants’ approaches was to encourage their children to explore various interests and subjects by attending out-of-school programs before middle school. The participants explained that the depth and the variety of the learning subjects and themes in out-of-school programs were beyond regular school learning. In other words, children were more likely to explore and find their interest in an out-of-school learning setting. Moreover, many parents seemed to believe that their children’s talent in particular subjects could be found through the process of attending out-of-school programs. Hence, placing children in out-of-school programs had changed from supplemental learning to necessary for many parents.

Although broadening children’s learning experiences and exploring interests seemed to be the primary purpose for many parents, the subjects and the program selection were still influenced by the educational system. According to the participants, English learning and STEM-related programs seemed to be parents’ primary choices. Also, physical development-related programs were the top choice for parents with younger children. Compared to those programs, art tended to be a secondary option. The participants explained that because many pre-schools provided afterschool art classes, parents might consider those art classes sufficient for their
children’s needs. Therefore, parents might allocate their limited resources to other non-art programs.

**Academic Performance is Still the Dominant Discourse**

All the participants agreed that the CAP and the GSAT profoundly influence most people’s parenting styles. According to their experiences, having excellent academic performance in school was still emphasized and will only escalate in middle and high school due to the GSAT. The participants shared their past learning experiences and their reflections on how those experiences changed their viewpoint on parenting. They pointed out that prioritizing academic performance was still a dominant conception in Taiwan’s society. Further, they shared how they coped with this phenomenon and navigated approaches for balancing this educational reality with their ideal education philosophy.

Parents’ accomplishment driven attitude about their children’s out-of-school art learning consisted of several factors, and ZL believed the educational system has marginalized art due in part to dominant discourses that prioritize academic performance. ZL went to a very competitive middle school and added that attending the best and most well-known high schools and colleges was the goal for many parents. ZL explained that many parents, especially his parents’ generation, believed that going to a good school and choosing the right major can guarantee a successful and decent salary job, which was a high priority, and therefore cultivating personal interests was neglected. This career success-driven mindset resulted in art being treated as secondary and unnecessary both in- and out-of-school.

I feel art learning tends to be cut off in middle school, which is an issue in our educational system. Like, you could be interested in art or music, but you might be forced to give it up because of the pressure of having a good academic performance, especially
in the seventh and eighth grades. When I was in middle school, once you started realizing or being told that your grade is everything, you have no choice but to put all your interests aside, not to mention to continue with out-of-school art programs…After middle and high school, I no longer knew what my interests were because the only purpose was to get excellent GSAT grades and get into a top-tier school. And then, applying for university and getting into a program that can secure you a decent job with a decent salary. Was I interested in this [job]? Actually, I’m not. (ZL, in-person interview, July 17, 2019)

SL was an elementary school teacher. She shared her observations about parents’ perspectives of educational philosophy. Some parents emphasized that students’ academic performance should be the primary principle; others believed that children’s mental health and emotional development should be the most crucial focus. From SL’s perspective, finding a balance between these two perspectives should be the most appropriate approach for child development.

There are two types of parents in my school. One group wants their children to be happy. Another group thinks cognitive development is essential, and they tend to use an elitist approach to educate their children, especially in this district. You know, I found it interesting to see our English teachers say that the students with parents who only want their children to be happy are more likely to have lower English writing skills. However, their speaking skills tend to be very good, but they might not be good at spelling. So, I think it is important to balance it. Like, even though students might get a good grade, if they don’t know how to communicate with people or don’t know how to take care of themselves, it is still not working. (SL, in-person interview, July 22, 2019)

According to IC, children’s health and happiness were the priorities many parents care about most. Parents of IC’s age had been aware of the importance of children’s emotional development and mental health. They wanted to support their children in exploring different fields other than school subjects. IC’s thought was similar to what SY described. She addressed that many parents of their cohort have been more open-minded than their parents’ generation. However, SY recognized that the overarching education structure was still an unshakable principle that framed her parenting approaches. Specifically, SY still wanted her children to
explore their interests as long as they could manage to keep their academic performance to the basic standard required.

I think the vast majority of parents care about their children’s physical health the most, um, and also want their kids to be happy and do things they like. (IC, in-person interview, July 12, 2019)

I feel our generation has been more open-minded, even though children’s academic performance is still prioritized by many parents. At least there are very few academic performance-driven parents among my friend groups. Also, we can’t force our kids to do things that they don’t like. Yet, we still need to face the pressure from the GSAT. So, as long as they can handle their schoolwork, I fully support them to explore whatever they want to. (SY, in-person interview, July 18, 2019)

YW shared her feeling of parent-peer pressure regarding parenting and their children’s learning. Although YW and her parent-peers seemed to favor a permissive parenting style, YW also sensed that academic performance was still a significant focus to the parents, especially when their children attended elementary school. YW pointed out that the pressure of academic performance and the competition between children actually resulted from parents’ ideology. She also experienced adjusting her viewpoints for a more flexible child-centric parenting perspective.

Um, I do feel parent-peer pressure. My friends and I shared similar educational philosophies, which is why we are friends. But, when we were chatting, I could still feel they actually care about their kids’ grades a lot, and it more or less makes me feel stressed. I remember I was also very anxious about my son’s academic performance when he just entered first grade. Before he entered elementary school, all the teachers he had were very hands-off and encouraged him to explore everything. In fact, I do like those teachers’ approaches, but I was also aware that there were very few teachers in the school system like those teachers from his pre-school and out-of-school programs. So, my husband told me that all the pressure comes from parents, not their children. As long as we know what we are doing and focus on our children, we are good. That is why I don’t push my kids a lot. So, when other parents talked about their children’s grades, I told myself that I just wanted my kids to be happy, ordinary individuals. I won’t compare them with other kids because that makes me think of when I was little, the adults liked to show off their kids’ grades and compare them to each other, and I don’t like that. (YW, in-person interview, July 16, 2019)

Although wanting children to have a care-free learning environment was many parents’
goal, MY pointed out that the most significant barrier for parents to practice this educational goal was the educational system and the social climate that prioritized academic performance and accomplishments. This societal structural issue made MY decide to expose her children to many types of arts and activities before the pressure of academic performance in middle school took over her children’s daily life.

I feel many Taiwanese parents are facing a problem. Parents in my generation want their children to grow up happily and learn happily. But, when you get older, you know that it is difficult to achieve these goals under this education system. So, what we can do is try our best, such as letting them experience all kinds of out-of-school programs to help them find out their interests or something they like. Because their interests can be with them for a long time, they won’t feel lonely even when they are alone. (MY, in-person interview, July 16, 2019)

According to the parent-participants narratives, they recognized that the concept of prioritizing academic performance could not be avoided. Under this educational structure, one of the challenges for their parenting approaches was finding a balance between pursuing academic performance and pursuing carefree learning. They wanted to ensure their children could explore as many things as possible before entering middle school because they believed if children find their interests, it could bring happiness to them. Therefore, the participants consciously selected out-of-school art programs for their children because they determined that out-of-school programs could offer more learning opportunities and are more likely to help children find their interests.

Out-of-School Programs Became Necessary for Early Education

According to the participants’ descriptions, English learning is necessary for children from many parents’ perspectives. In addition to English, art, music, and sports were also common subjects that many parents considered essential to their children’s development.
However, the participants believed that a regular public school education did not meet the baseline needs of their children. Therefore, out-of-school learning became a necessary condition for child development. This concept influenced the structure of many private pre-schools and parents’ selections of out-of-school programs. The participants mentioned if children went to public schools, their parents tended to place them in several out-of-school programs as supplemental learning, and English learning was their first choice, even though English was already a school subject in public elementary schools.

Private pre-schools, on the other hand, offered a different option that was appealing to some parents who did not have time to take their children to out-of-school programs. Specifically, many private institutions offered bilingual learning environments as their selling point. To make the programs even more appealing, these schools included extra art and music classes as another strategy. In other words, although private pre-schools’ tuition fees were more expensive than public pre-school, they bundled up regular school learning with supplemental learning, which was equivalent to out-of-school programs.

Parents’ priorities regarding children’s learning also impacts their resource allocation, such as investment of children’s out-of-school learning. IC mentioned that English language learning was many parents’ first choice because they often associated foreign language learning with international perspectives, which was an embedded ideology among many parents. Sport-related programs were also on the priority list because parents valued children’s physical health. Learning music and arts seemed to be optional, depending on their children’s interests. Moreover, STEM-related programs were also a popular option.

I feel for the people around me and the parents from my daughter’s class, English learning seems to be what they are anxious about the most. Besides language learning, sports, piano, and art are also popular. It depends on the children’s interests. Some trendy
themes are also popular, such as programming-related classes or science camps, um, and second languages. I guess people believe they should cultivate their children’s international perspectives. (IC, in-person interview, July 12, 2019)

MY also shared the same thought regarding many Taiwanese parents’ priority of children’s learning. According to MY, many higher income parents enroll their children in bilingual pre-schools and private schools because the schools provided better English language learning environments. Additionally, private schools also provided advanced music lessons, which was another factor that attracted parents. Although attending bilingual pre-schools and private schools seems to be popular for some parents, MY did not think this option suited her and her children’s situation.

I would say, it depends on how parents arrange their resources. Some parents think that their kids should start learning English from a young age, so they will send their kids to bilingual pre-school programs. Those parents are more likely to select private schools for their kids because typically private schools have foreign teachers. Other programs, like piano, are essential to them. But it really depends, like myself, I don’t think it is necessary, so I don’t feel stressed about it. (MY, in-person interview, July 16, 2019)

SH explained that to serve many parents’ needs regarding work schedules, private pre-schools and kindergartens typically offered a full-time class schedule, including afterschool classes and summer/winter camps. Moreover, SH felt that Taiwanese parents prioritize cognitive development and language learning. Even for the parents who do not work full time, given limited time or budgets, they tended to choose English or STEM-related programs over art programs.

Generally speaking, private pre-schools and kindergartens should include everything. If they choose public pre-school, both parents might have full-time jobs. So, suppose they want to place their children in afterschool or out-of-school programs. In that case, they tend to choose cognitive development-related classes. Art might not be their first choice because I feel Taiwan’s parents still value academic performances and language skills. English or science might be their priority. (SH, in-person interview, July 15, 2019)

SH further pointed out the main reason why the discussion about out-of-school art programs

among parents was not as popular as other types of programs: art classes had already been embedded into regular class schedules in pre-schools and kindergartens. Furthermore, SH noticed that many parents were inclined to choose programs that advertised themes related to developmental theories, such as muscular coordination and creativity, or classes with fancy topics.

I feel that the selection of art programs is not a trendy topic among parents. I guess it might be because many pre-schools and kindergartens have already offered art-related extended classes, so it isn’t necessary to find another out-of-school art program for the kids. Another consideration is whether the kid shows artistic talent. The thing is that the programs have to show something unique because many schools have already offered stuff like clay or drawing classes. So, if parents are looking for different weekend programs for their kids, they are more likely to choose fancy programs, such as robots or programming, and it has to do with creativity or some sort. So, parents might think: yeah, it sounds brilliant, and then they will pay for it [laugh]. (SH, in-person interview, July 15, 2019)

MY pointed out that children’s physical development was also a popular concept for parents in Taiwan. There is myriad information about children’s gross motor skill and fine motor skill development on the internet and in media, which directly influenced parents’ decision making regarding selecting out-of-school programs for young children. MY mentioned that programs for rhythm movement and sports became trendy among parents because many parents believed that children’s gross motor skills should be developed before fine motor skills. Therefore, art-related programs became secondary and would not be considered until children were older. This phenomenon resulted from marketing strategies and media influences, and it was further reinforced by peer pressure. According to MY’s narratives, when the vast majority of parent-friends took their children to a rhythm movement class, those who did not attend were seen as outcasts.

I feel physical development-related programs seem to be a quite popular choice among parents, and art seems secondary. Um, I should say, because everyone said that children
develop their gross motor skills first and gradually move on to fine motor skills
development. Like, teachers and media tell you about it constantly and brainwash you the
significance of it. So, like swimming class, they would say, this can help physical
coordination and is essential to every child. Therefore, many parents have sent their
children to swimming classes since kindergarten. Many parents buy it as long as they can
rationalize their classes and use theories to support them. And, it would be like, if you
didn’t place your kids in that kind of program, your friends might question you and say:
why you don’t let your kids practice their fine motor skills or creativity, etc., and you
have to debate it in your mind. (MY, in-person interview, July 16, 2019)

Another factor that impacted parents’ decision making regarding out-of-school art
programs was the schedule of pre-schools and kindergartens. SH described that classes normally
ended at four o’clock, and schools offered afterschool paid art classes, so parents can come pick
up their children later. Many parents took advantage of this service because most of them had to
work until six. Therefore, if children had taken art classes at school, it was less likely that parents
would register for another out-of-school art program for their children.

Many private pre-school programs are until four, and they offer extended art classes after
four. The purpose is because many parents get out of work around six, and they might not
be able to find someone to pick their kids up at four. So, they are usually willing to pay
for the extended art classes, and the school hires teachers from outside to teach the class.
Of course, parents can choose not to spend extra money and just let their kids stay in the
school and play until six. (SH, in-person interview, July 15, 2019)

Overall, the participants considered that out-of-school programs were necessary and
could supplement in-school learning. Among all the options for out-of-school programs, English
learning was many parents’ priority. Art learning was not many parents’ top choice because of
two possible factors. First, many pre-schools already include art classes in the school schedule or
offer an add-on art class. Second, many non-art programs offer related learning topics that might
supplant art classes.
The participants shared their observations of some parents’ characteristics that were directly or indirectly shaped by the educational system. Aside from exploring children’s interests, another reason parents place their children in many out-of-school programs was to discover children’s talent in subjects. According to the participants’ descriptions, to determine whether children have talent in some things, parents tended to focus on immediate results first and then strengthen the learning to cultivate their children’s talent.

SY described that many Taiwanese parents she knew or heard of seemed to follow a certain agenda when placing their children in out-of-school art programs. Those parents were purpose driven, such as competition and accomplishments. If they noticed their children might be talented in art, they tended to push their children to pursue advanced improvement in art creation by placing them in art programs that provide the teaching they needed.

I noticed that many Taiwanese parents have their kids try everything. If they find out their kids have a talent for something, they will invest in these topics and take their kids to classes…actually, peer pressure is really strong among parents. There are so many programs with various themes, and you have to compare everything because there is too much information. (SY, in-person interview, July 9, 2019)

Moreover, the purpose driven tendency may lead to a situation in which parents seek instant results and maximum return on investment for out-of-school learning. In other words, they might overlook the importance of the creative process and see art production as merely the final artwork.

I also noticed that many parents like to see results. For example, if the kids have gone to the class once or twice, the parents might expect to see an instant result so that they won’t feel their kids were wasting time. Like, some parents might say something like, if a kid only completed the work partially, they might say, well, why did you only do so little today? (SH, in-person interview, July 15, 2019)
SY shared her observation regarding the trend of art education in the elementary school system. She explained that interdisciplinary learning connects children’s daily lives and school subjects, enhancing a more creative and flexible learning environment. This trend also results in booming out-of-school programs and cram schools that advertise cross-disciplinary learning content. However, SY brought up concerns regarding the difficulty of choosing an appropriate program because the actual learning content in some programs might not match the advertisement.

I like to see an integration of science, art, and daily life, and it is the right direction to break the boundary between everyday life and school subjects. However, I can’t really tell if those slogans have a real educational purpose or if they are just marketing strategies. For example, you can see out-of-school programs everywhere, and they are touting themselves as interdisciplinary programs. So, I wasn’t sure if my kids were learning something good for them or if this was just a program’s marketing slogan. Yeah, it is hard to tell. (SY, in-person interview, July 9, 2019)

Many participants agreed that compared to their parents’ generation, the ideology about education and parenting had changed and become more open-minded and liberal. However, the educational concept of being academically successful still exists. It has transformed into a different manifestation and still influences the structures of in-school and out-of-school learning as well as parents’ parenting perspectives.

The participants’ narratives suggested that children’s academic performance was the dominant discourse in the current educational system. Placing children in out-of-school programs became a necessary option because doing so can broaden children’s learning outside of school and help them explore interests. However, art was not the top choice for many parents because the educational system still influenced their selection of out-of-school programs. Specifically, English learning and STEM-related programs were the most popular options, likely due to their proximity to academics. Also, pre-schools providing afterschool art classes was another factor
that might cause parents to decide that placing their children in another out-of-school art program would be unnecessary.

**Influences of Work Experiences**

The participants shared how their working experiences shaped their parenting styles. The participants whose working experiences related to counseling and developmental psychology tended to emphasize the importance of personality development, and they also applied those concepts to their parenting approaches. Some participants had an educational background, and they paid particular attention to teachers’ teaching methods and teacher-student interactions in out-of-school programs. On the other hand, some participants reexamined their working experiences and highlighted that cultivating personal interests was more important than finding a job.

KY’s experience as an editor who handles many counseling-related textbooks significantly influenced her viewpoints regarding education and parenting. KY prioritized her children’s personality development over academic performance, and she adjusted her parenting approaches according to her child’s temperament.

I was a textbook editor, and I was in charge of counseling-related books. Because of this, I feel personality development is the most important thing, and my children’s academic performance is less critical to my husband and me. But then there was an issue that came up. My son seems not to care about his school performance [laugh]. Well, our original thought was that we didn’t want to force him to learn, and we wanted him to be able to spontaneously do it himself. But then we noticed that he is overly laid back. Perhaps this is just his personality [laugh]. I think we might adjust our parenting approaches for my younger daughter and be less hand-off. (KY, in-person interview, July 17, 2019)

SH specialized in children’s counseling, and she worked with many children with different needs. Her specialty allowed her to be more empathetic with her children. In addition,
SH had connections with therapists who specialized in other fields, such as physiotherapists and speech therapists. Because of her job, SH and her co-workers usually discussed different cases, which sometimes included their own children. This work experience allowed her to analyze the interaction between her children and her from different angles, which helped her adjust her parenting approaches.

Because I worked with kids at work, I can empathize with why she [SH’s daughter] does this or that. For example, she got upset out of the blue, and I can more or less guess what factors caused this emotion…I also learned from friends and coworkers because they might have different perspectives or approaches when dealing with cases. Um, I believe the most important thing when working with kids is being empathetic. Only when kids feel they are listened to and understood, they will be willing to work with you. (SH, in-person interview, July 15, 2019)

SL was an elementary school teacher who emphasized positive teacher-student interaction and students’ learning processes. She carefully observed every out-of-school program in which she placed her children and was sensitive to the teachers’ teaching approaches. SL preferred the teachers who were patient with students and prioritized children’s learning processes over outcomes. If she sensed any red flags about inappropriate teaching attitudes or approaches, she would decide to withdraw from the programs based on her teaching experiences.

Because I’m a teacher, I particularly emphasize some of the details when observing other teachers’ teachings. Such as, how they treat kids. Yeah, for example, my kids and I have gone to many out-of-school programs, and at one, I noticed that the completion of the task of the day seemed to be the teacher’s focus. In fact, I don’t like this approach because I believe the process is way more important than the completion. It doesn’t matter what task it was, the students’ attitudes and reactions are more significant. Also, I would pay attention to their behavior, like, if they were thinking, I would give them more time. So, if I noticed that the teachers didn’t have those criteria, I would withdraw my kids from the class. (SL, in-person interview, July 22, 2019)

Similar to SL, teachers’ proficiency was a significant criterion when YW selected out-of-school programs. YW’s working experiences as a pre-school teacher allowed her to distinguish different teaching qualities. Although most pre-schools and kindergartens offered add-on art
classes as afterschool classes, YW was clearly aware that those art classes act more like babysitting rather than formal art learning. Additionally, YW mentioned that the add-on art class were not open for parents to watch, so she could not see how the teacher delivered the art lesson.

Because I’m an educator, teacher professionalism is an important criterion that I care about. Even though the pre-school offers after-school art classes, I consider those are basic classes. So, I still found other out-of-school art programs because I feel they are more professional. Another reason was that I couldn’t see the teaching and classroom interaction in the pre-school art class, so I wasn’t sure if those teachers were professional or not. (YW, in-person interview, July 16, 2019)

ZL’s work experiences profoundly influenced him in a different way. ZL described his learning and working experiences as very profit driven. He grew up in a social climate that denoted a successful life as entering a career-promising program at a famous university and earning a decent salary in a renowned company. To fulfill this goal, he sacrificed his interests in arts and other fields. Although he had completed this goal and he was working for a high-technology enterprise, he did not enjoy the work. Because of this experience, ZL formed a vital perspective that he did not want his children to be limited by required academic performance and expectations. He tried to support them in exploring art and anything that might interest them.

After experiencing middle and high school, I no longer knew what my interests were. The only goal was getting high scores in the GSAT and selecting a school and major that can help me find a decent job. It doesn’t matter if I liked this major or not, um, actually, I’m not interested in computer science at all…I hope my kids won’t experience the same thing as I did, um, giving up art for the GSAT. We try to encourage and support them. At least, I feel, I don’t want them to be limited by a particular direction. If they are interested in art, even though art-related job opportunity might be limited, I won’t stop them from pursuing what they like. (ZL, in-person interview, July 17, 2019)

The participants’ working experiences influenced different domains in their parenting. For some participants, their work experiences helped them empathize with their children better. Other participants had educational working experiences that allowed them to be more observant of and careful about their children’s out-of-school learning experiences. Some parents’ work
history did not involve education or development, but their experiences still influenced their parenting philosophies.

Mesosystem

The mesosystem refers to the interrelations among two or more settings in which the parent-participants actively participated (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In this study, the parents’ mesosystem included their art-related experiences and peer groups that may have impacted their perspectives of art education. The parents’ previous art-related experiences consisted of their interactions with the teacher and the other members in the art classes in which they had participated. Moreover, the parents closely and frequently interacted with their peer groups, which had an influence on them.

According to the participants, parent support was a critical factor determining their children’s art learning opportunities both inside and outside of school. The participants reexamined their art learning experiences in school, allowing them to be more observant in their children’s art learning and teachers’ instructions. Furthermore, the participants’ peer groups provided helpful information about parenting and programs. Although the peer groups supported the participants in many ways, they also came with peer pressure that directly or indirectly influenced their parenting approaches and concepts.

Art-Related Experiences

The parents’ art-related contexts provided important information that helped reveal the participants’ perspectives on how children learn art. According to the parents’ narratives about their childhood, the ideology of prioritizing academic performance influenced the participants’
parents’ attitude toward art learning. Although the participants may have showed interest and talent in art, their parents did not support them in pursuing art professionally or recreationally. After experiencing the GSAT, finding jobs, and becoming parents, the participants expressed that art was a significant aspect of individuals’ lives and should not be inhibited. They wanted to be parents who encouraged their children to learn art. Additionally, the participants’ in-school art learning experiences allowed them to reexamine their viewpoints of in- and out-of-school art learning and helped them become more observant of their children’s learning experiences. Furthermore, the participants’ reflections addressed cultivating children’s internal motivation for art, tailoring instructional approaches for individual students, exposing children to various art mediums, and giving appropriate positive reinforcement.

**Reflection on Art Learning Experiences Changed Parenting Approaches**

The parents’ attitudes toward children learning art directly influenced their children’s art learning opportunities. The participants addressed that their interests in art were not supported by their parents in their childhood. Therefore, the participants’ reflections on their art learning experiences and their parents’ attitudes changed their perspectives of art learning and further motivated them to be parents who encouraged their children to do art. ML grew up in a traditional environment where any subject besides the so-called main subjects, such as math and languages, was marginalized. Art was treated as secondary, and this atmosphere enveloped both school and home. ML rarely had art class in school, and her parents did not support art learning. ML described that her parents restricted their children’s interest development because her parents believed that success in life was only derived from attending the best school. Because ML’s parents did not support her doing art and the school did not
provide proper art classes, the only way to fulfill her enthusiasm about art was to do it secretly without being noticed by her parents.

When I was in school, grades were everything. The criteria were if you can get full points for an exam and the GSAT. My parents tended to verbally scare me, like, the only way to live a good life is to enter the top-tier schools; if not, your life will be miserable, etc. You know, that kind of extreme phrasing… Even my leisure time was restrained. Like I read novels, and their response was like, that is not textbook or school-related readings…I felt the fact that behind being rigorous was that they didn’t really know the mechanism of how the world is operating…before I got into high school, art was a subject that I really wanted to take, but I couldn’t because all the art classes were replaced by math classes…but I had loved art ever since I was little. So when I went to the library, I was drawn to the art section and I doodled secretly…Until I entered high school, I was stunned by my classmates’ eloquence, and they knew so many things outside of the textbook. This realization made me start doubting myself. Um, so I don’t want my kids to be limited by a traditional educational system and ideology. (ML, in-person interview, July 14, 2019)

ML’s learning experiences were completely changed after she entered high school. She was impressed by peers who had various interests and vibrant lifestyles. Because she saw the different learning experiences between her peers and her, she decided to provide diverse learning opportunities and support for her children to develop their interests.

ZL shared similar learning experiences. ZL had art class only when he was in elementary school. ZL showed a great passion for art when he was in elementary school. However, he gave up on art during middle school because of prioritizing exams and academic performance, which determined whether he could enter a top-notch high school. He explained it was difficult to continue creating art without his parents’ support because schools could easily ignore the subjects that did not require standardized tests. ZL further mentioned another common ideology for his parents’ generation was that doing art cannot make money. He reflected on his learning experiences and clearly knew that he wanted to be a more supportive parent for his children.

I don’t remember art class in middle school, but I still remember the set-up of the art room and what I made in art class in elementary school…I don’t want my kids to give up
on doing art due to the pressure of the GSAT. I feel many parents in Taiwan, like my dad and my mom, even though they knew I was so into art, but they didn’t take it seriously. I would say, if parents didn’t value their children’s interest in art, children might be compelled to give up doing art due to the pressure of schoolwork. We will keep supporting our daughter to explore her interest in art until she actively tells us that she is no longer interested in it. Even though pursuing art as her future career might not be easy, I want her to try. (ZL, in-person interview, July 17, 2019)

SH agreed her interest and talent in art were not fostered when she was a child. She remembered that her parents did not support her in doing art because they considered art to be less important than academic performance, even though she showed strong enthusiasm about it. This experience profoundly influenced SH, so she applied a different parenting style than her parents because she wanted to encourage and support her children to do art.

I still remember vividly that I loved drawing and doing art when I was young, but my mom didn’t allow me to go to art classes. I felt my interest and talent in art were gone because I didn’t receive the instruction that I might need at the right time. So, I think that everyone’s parenting style is actually influenced by their parents. I mean, you either want to be a parent like your dad and mom, or you don’t. Like myself, I want to be a different parent from my parents. When I became a parent, I told myself I wanted to support my kids to explore what they love, like doing art, instead of only emphasizing school’s grades, like my parents. (SH, in-person interview, July 15, 2019)

Similar to SH’s experience, YW loved doing art when she was young. Instead of placing her in out-of-school art programs, YW’s parents chose to send her to a private school that offered various afterschool classes, including art.

I loved art when I was little, but my mom didn’t send me to any out-of-school art programs because I went to a private school... My parents are very busy people, so they thought sending me to a private school was the most convenient way because it provided many after-school programs, so they didn’t have to look for other out-of-school programs for me. (YW, in-person interview, July 16, 2019)

ML, ZL, SH, and YW showed great interest in art but were not supported by their parents. One of the significant factors was the ideology of prioritizing academic performance and the influence of the GSAT. Their learning experiences shaped their viewpoints of parenting and
made them become parents who wanted to support their children to do art rather than restraining their interest in art.

Reflection on In-School Art Learning Experiences Helped Observe Children’s Learning

The participants shared their art learning experiences in schools. Some participants experienced frustration in art class that negatively influenced their confidence in doing art. Others had more positive art learning experiences in school that still influenced their viewpoints of school art class. They also compared their art learning experiences with their children’s and developed the significant criteria for the type of art classes they expected.

MY reflected on her art learning experiences in school and mentioned that having an interest in art can be an important factor for influencing the quality of individuals’ art learning experiences. She had some great art teachers in middle and high school, yet she did not grasp the concepts that had been taught because she did not have strong internal motivation for art learning.

My art teacher from high school was a hardworking teacher. Even though art is not included in the GSAT, she still insisted that students must take it seriously. I remember we learned interior design and ink painting etc. I also remember that we learned Impressionism in middle school. Um, now I think back, I feel that if I knew the key point or the concept of the art that was taught, I should be able to draw it better. But I wasn’t interested in art in middle and high school, so I didn’t grasp what the teachers said in class. (MY, in-person interview, July 9, 2019)

MY talked about her frustration about doing art when she was in elementary school. During that stage, students have already developed an opinion regarding the quality of art creations, so when comparing artwork with her peers and noticing that her art was not as good as others, the defeated feeling became a negative art learning experience.

To be honest, art wasn’t my favorite nor my interest. I have known it since I was a kid. I
can tell that compared to my friends’ artwork, mine wasn’t good, so I felt like, this was not my thing…also, I knew that if I couldn’t nail it, I might get frustrated and upset. (MY, in-person interview, July 9, 2019)

She further compared her experiences with her husband’s experiences. She believed that immersing oneself in art in everyday life was essential for developing an individual’s sense of art. Because ML’s husband was from France and grew up surrounded by art, both MY and her husband insisted that exposing their children to art should be a part of daily life.

Both my husband and I don’t have an art background. But I think his opinion might be because he is European and comes from a place where art is everywhere. So he feels that art is essential. He doesn’t do art, but he likes to appreciate art. It feels like art has integrated into their daily lives. So, my husband believes that art is part of everyday life experiences, and that is why we think bringing kids to museums is important. (MY, in-person interview, July 9, 2019)

SY did not have memorable art learning experiences in elementary school and did not have many opportunities to use various art mediums. Until her children attended out-of-school art programs, she had not realized that different art mediums could be used together to make art and create unexpected effects and various applications.

I remember most of the time we used crayons. We didn’t have many options, and we didn’t have so many different mediums like my kids have. We used a single medium for the entire project most of the time. I didn’t know that you could use mix-medium to create artwork or even 3D sculptures until I saw the art projects that my kids did in the out-of-school art class. (SY, in-person interview, July 18, 2019)

JL had a very positive art learning experience in an out-of-school art program when she was a child. She complimented her teacher’s teaching strategies. For example, JL described that the teacher tailored the learning contents and teaching approach according to each student’s characteristics. She further emphasized that the art teacher made the art learning experience fun and exciting and helped build students’ confidence. To JL, the out-of-school art class from her childhood seemed more insightful than many current out-of-school art programs.
I went to an out-of-school art program when I was in elementary school. I really liked that art teacher because she used a lot of mediums and tailored the lessons according to students’ needs. So, it was a great place for students to develop a personal style of art creation...I remember we did East Asian calligraphy. We used oversized brushes to draw figures, and it felt like playing to kids. Um, she also paid attention to everyone’s writing characteristics and assigned different calligraphy copybooks. I think that was a student-centric teaching approach. (JL, in-person interview, July 11, 2019)

ZL had a pleasant memory of art learning in elementary school because of his interest in art and the teacher’s compliment. He remembered that he attended art contests and earned awards, and these experiences reinforced his confidence and passion for art.

I loved drawing when I was a kid, and I remember I went to some drawing competitions. I would say my memory about and interest in art was also impacted by the art teachers’ praise. I mean, it was mutually influenced. I was interested in art, and I won prizes. Then the teachers’ positive reinforcement made me even more confident in art. So, each component came together and created a good memory about doing art. (ZL, in-person interview, July 17, 2019)

KY also had a positive memory about attending an art contest. Her experience was slightly different from ZL’s. Besides earning awards, KY felt that the most memorable take-away from entering an art contest was having the opportunity to receive extra instruction and practice with the art medium. She further elaborated that although earning awards was a great incentive, having unique chances to challenge herself to grow was priceless. Compared with her art experiences, she felt that her children’s school did not offer such an opportunity in school.

I remember I used to attend a paper crafting competition. Because we lived in the same neighborhood, my art teacher spent time after school and during weekends to tutor and train me for the competition. That was a unique experience. It was like, you did a good job for class assignments, and the school offered you advanced learning opportunities. To me, winning a prize was never the thing that I cared about; I cared more about whether I got to learn something different or more advanced... I was lucky that I got to try so many art mediums when I was in elementary school. In contrast to my son’s art class in school, I feel that he didn’t do something as special as I did. (KY, in-person interview, July 17, 2019)

The participants’ art-related experiences included their parents’ attitudes toward art
learning and their art learning experiences in school. Many participants expressed their feelings regarding how their parents did not value their interest in art. These experiences became a force that motivated them to be a parent who supports their children in doing art. Additionally, some participants reexamined their art learning in school and shared how those experiences constituted their perspective of art class both in and out-of-school settings.

Influence of Peer Groups

The participants learned most of the information about parenting, activities, and programs from their peer groups. Social media was the primary platform for sharing information and communicating with peers. The participants agreed their peer groups provided helpful information and shared similar parenting and education perspectives. However, because parents can receive immediate responses and a great amount of information through social media, the instant digital connection might exacerbate parent peer pressure among their peer groups.

MY shared her observation of parents’ social media groups. MY recognized that parents’ social media groups were a convenience channel to receive information about various programs, education, and parenting. However, parents’ good intentions through sharing information could unintentionally pressure others. According to MY, parents in the groups liked to compare different information and give feedback. Often they unconsciously imposed their ideology on others without considering the differences among the families.

Peer pressure among parents is kind of terrifying. They shared so many programs in the group [social media group], perhaps way too much information. And there is a competitive atmosphere, like, which programs are better, and whose suggestions are better. If you ask a question in the group, everyone wants to give you guidance because they might think their parenting approaches are the best. But every family has different conditions and may have different parenting styles, so you can sometimes feel stressed. (MY, in-person interview, July 9, 2019)
For instance, MY talked to parents about trying to figure out proper out-of-school programs that fit her children’s interests. This might be a straightforward question to some parents because they believed the definite indicator of whether children are interested was when they performed well in the subjects. However, this conclusion might not apply appropriately to MY’s children because her children’s achievement might be driven by external motivations to act the way that parents want.

Sometimes we discussed out-of-school programs in the group, and they would say something like, my kids love this and that. And then I would ask them, how did you know if your kids genuinely love this class or not. Some parents respond certainly and say: because they perform very well in this subject, indicating that they love this class. But I thought that the kids performing well did not necessarily mean they were interested in it. Also, if kids didn’t do a task very well, they might be willing to keep working on it if you give them a bit of incentive. That is why I said I’m not sure if I fully grasp that. (MY, in-person interview, July 9, 2019)

IC also shared her observation of parent-peer pressure. She noticed that her parent-peers saw English learning as the priority when selecting out-of-school programs for children. Other subjects (such as sports, piano, arts, programming, STEM, maker, and a second language) were common options. IC recognized that parent-peer pressure did influence how one selected programs for their children and what they think of children’s art production. In other words, the parents’ competitive mindset might be a factor that influences children’s art learning experiences.

My friends and the parents that I know from my daughter’s school seem to be anxious about their children’s English learning. So, English learning programs are their first choice. And then sport-related programs, or piano and art. It depends on children’s interests. Some trendy themes like programming, science, maker, or second languages are popular, too...I feel that parent-peer pressure definitely influences a lot. For example, seeing other kids’ artworks can impact how you think of your kids’ works. (IC, in-person interview, July 12, 2019)

YW shared the same feeling about parent-peer pressure. She mentioned that children’s schoolwork and performance pressure came from their parents and the pressure was built by
parents’ competitive mentality. Although ZY described that her peer groups tended to be more open-minded, permissive, and supportive of their children exploring interests, she sensed that children’s academic performance was still an emphasis to many of her parent-peers.

Most of my friends share similar thoughts about parenting and education. Frankly, I feel that they still care about children’s school performance a lot, and it can put a bit of stress on me as well…So, when I heard they were talking about their kids’ grades, I would tell myself do not compare my kids with others, and I only compare what my kids have done previously and what they are doing now. (YW, in-person interview, July 16, 2019)

Parents’ social media groups also played an important role for SL in terms of socializing, sharing information about programs and events, and learning what is new. Some of SL’s close parent-friends usually shared information through social media and invited friends to join them.

A close friend of mine and her family love outdoor activities. Their Facebook posts are all about mountain climbing, hiking, cycling, swimming, etc. And another family loves camping. So, we usually follow their plan. For example, yesterday, they asked if we wanted to go to Alishan with them. (SL, in-person interview, July 22, 2019)

Although social media has made information more accessible than ever, being bombarded by information can cause parents to feel lost more easily. SL elaborated that many parents might feel overwhelmed by countless posts, such as parenting strategies, programming recommendations, and developmental suggestions. Therefore, having a clear educational philosophy and perspective was essential for parents to receive and digest information appropriately.

Information is flowing rapidly these days. You can find all kinds of parenting information everywhere, such as suggestions and programs. Also, there are many parenting books, like the German parenting book, Japanese parenting book, Danish parenting book, etc. There is so much parenting-related information out there. It is crucial to have your own educational and parenting goals, otherwise, you might get lost easily. (SL, in-person interview, July 22, 2019)

JL took advantage of several channels to gain information about out-of-school programs or community activities and events, such as from the internet, peer groups, and bookstores.

Although JL was also a member of many parents’ social media groups, her core peer groups were
coworkers and friends from college or graduate school because their children were about the same ages. Additionally, JL’s colleagues and friends from school had child development- and counseling-related backgrounds, so they became one of the most important resources where JL gained reliable parenting information.

I learned about the information [out-of-school programs] mainly from the Internet and friends, and sometimes I just happened to see it in bookstores. Then I would do a bit of research and try it… I wasn’t so into parents’ social media groups. But I have friends and coworkers, and our kids are about the same ages. So, I also ask them about the out-of-school program-related information. (JL, in-person interview, July 11, 2019)

Parents’ peer groups played an important role for information exchange, but these groups also brought peer pressure to the participants. Part of the pressure came from the quick flowing information about parenting, child development, and out-of-school programs across parents’ social media because everyone’s opinion appeared enlarged on social media. The participants also expressed that finding the most appropriate viewpoint that suited their situation among all different opinions and forming one’s parenting philosophy was a challenging but necessary step to take.

Microsystems among Parents, Children, and Teachers

The microsystem refers to the setting in which people engage in face-to-face interaction (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This study focused on the microsystem between parents and their children at home and the parent-child-teacher dynamic in out-of-school programs. According to the participants, carefully observing children’s needs, giving proper positive reinforcement, and attentively communicating with children were significant to the parent-child dynamic. Additionally, the interpersonal dynamic directly influenced children’s willingness to attend the class. Specifically, peer scaffolding, teachers’ humor and caring, and parents’ assistance helped
the children adapt to the class faster and better.

**Descriptions of Parent-Child Dynamic at Home**

The parent-child dynamic at home demonstrated the participants’ parenting philosophy practices. According to the parent-participants’ narratives, their parent-child interactions can be divided into three aspects. The first is about observing their children’s needs to adjust their parenting approaches. The participants stressed the importance of empathizing with children’s positions. Especially for young children, who might not be able to express their needs clearly, parents must carefully observe their children’s behaviors and reactions to make appropriate adjustments for their parenting approaches. The second aspect involves giving proper positive reinforcement when interacting with children to help develop their confidence. The participants shared that when encountering children’s reluctance to go to out-of-school programs, parents needed to patiently communicate with their children about the purposes of the decisions. Thirdly, the participants emphasized enhancing children’s visual experiences by taking them to visit museums to integrate art into their daily lives.

To learn children’s needs, the participants carefully observed their children’s behaviors, which helped them to empathize with their children’s position. They also encouraged their children to express ideas and thoughts about the artwork to cultivate their confidence. Furthermore, attentively communicating with children was significant to develop a positive parent-child dynamic because children could feel respected and heard.

**Observing Children’s Needs to Adjust Parenting Approaches**

The participants shared their observations of their children’s development and interests to
select appropriate out-of-school programs for their children. For example, some participants noticed their children showed interest and talent in art; others realized their children needed professional instruction to help them develop. In addition, the participants observed their children’s temperament through daily interactions that enabled them to adjust their parenting approaches.

IC further explained that she encouraged her daughter to do art because she noticed her daughter struggled with fine motor skills. Because IC was specialized in child development, she was sensitive to her daughter’s emotional states and reactions. IC closely communicated with the teachers from the out-of-school art program to help her daughter develop not only self-esteem in art creation but also her fine motor skills. IC also noticed that her daughter seemed to associate parent assistance with perceived incompetence. Therefore, IC tended to not directly intervene in her daughter’s art learning but played a more supportive role.

In fact, her fine motor skills development is a bit delayed. She has certain standards for the quality that she wants to achieve, but she hasn’t yet reached the level of skills. So, she gets frustrated quickly. I would sit down with her while she was drawing and encourage her. So, I found the out-of-school art program, and one of the teachers is a friend of mine. I talked to the teacher about my daughter’s situation. So, the teacher would give her some extra help or instruction during the art creation process. I also noticed that if I intervene, such as telling her what to do, she might think it was because she didn’t do it well enough and feel embarrassed. Therefore, I think it would be better for her to go to art classes and have art teachers teach her rather than I teach her because her responses are different. (IC, in-person interview, July 12, 2019)

ZY also noticed that his son had a great sense of space because he loved constructing complex subjects using LEGO. Moreover, ZY’s son actively asked to go to art class when ZY asked what programs he was interested in. Therefore, ZY supported his son by placing him in out-of-school art programs and giving positive verbal encouragement.

I asked him what he likes the most, and he said he wants to do art. In fact, I think he is talented. Compared to his younger brother, he is more creative and has more ideas…For
example, when playing with LEGO, he can build very complex structures, such as a warship, fighter aircraft, or a train station. I feel he has a pretty good sense of space, and he also shows excellent imagination about his works. (ZY, in-person interview, July 16, 2019)

MY mentioned she and her husband believed that art is a professional field and their children’s art learning required professional instruction. They typically did not draw or do crafts with their children at home because they did not consider themselves capable to do so. MY valued her children’s art learning experiences, so she chose to place her children in out-of-school art programs.

I’m not good at art, and I feel that I can’t help them [children] with this matter. Although my husband and I spend quite a lot of time with our kids, we normally won’t sit down and doodle or play with clay. So, it would be better to have a professional art teacher to guide them to do art. I think a better environment and instruction can motivate them, such as listening to the teacher and seeing how other kids do their works. That is why I placed them in the art program. (MY, in-person interview, July 9, 2019)

MY also carefully observed her children’s learning and adjusted her out-of-school selection consideration. She described her daughter as a very adaptive child who seems to accept all kinds of classes. This was concerning to MY because it was difficult to tell whether her daughter liked this class, and not knowing added a layer of challenge when selecting out-of-school programs for her daughter.

Like my daughter, who can adapt to any kind of situation, it is hard to see whether she likes the class or not. Her liking the class might be because her friends were in the same class. If she seemed like she wasn’t excited about the class, it might be because she felt bored today. As parents, it is hard to make a decision for kids if they don’t show a specific interest and adapt to the environment very well. For example, if you asked her whether she wanted to continue the class, she might say yes because of her classmates. Sometimes she might say no because the class was boring. It depends on the day. Yeah, it is hard. (MY, in-person interview, July 9, 2019)

ZL pointed out that because his wife was an art teacher and their child showed great interest in art creation, they regularly do art with their child at home. ZL mentioned that he and
his wife utilized different approaches to guide their children to do art. His wife emphasized the completion of the artwork and encouraged their child to focus more on observing the details. On the other hand, ZL tended to be more hands-off in terms of the artwork’s quality and details. Instead, he stressed whether their child participated in a project responsibly because this was essential for children’s learning and development.

Because my wife is an art teacher, she would remind our daughter about the details of the figure when they were drawing together at home. Such as, “you can add more color here on the hair.” Um, I’m not an art major, so I tend to let her draw whatever she wants. What I care about the most is her attitude. Like, if she patiently completes the drawing or does it perfunctorily. The details of the work are secondary to me. (ZL, in-person interview, July 17, 2019)

SH tended to be more dominant and made decisions for her children regarding attending out-of-programs because when they were younger, they might not be able to clearly express and distinguish their interests. Although SH made most of the decisions for her daughters, she was aware of their identity, emotional, and interest development. She explained that parents should respect and support their preferences when children reach the stage in which they have already shown an apparent inclination toward certain things.

They usually said that they didn’t want to go to classes. But often, they said it doesn’t mean they don’t like the classes. Like, they seemed reluctant before we headed to the class, but I can tell they had a great time in class when I picked them up. Basically, I made all decisions [out-of-school programs] for them when they were younger, and most of the time, I stuck to my plan because I thought attending those programs was good for them. Now they are six, and they’ve started developing their preferences. If they kept saying that they don’t want to go to a particular class for a long time, that means they genuinely don’t like it, and I should respect their unwillingness. (SH, in-person interview, July 15, 2019)

Understanding children’s needs enabled the participants to adjust their parenting strategies and select proper out-of-school programs to fulfill their children’s needs. Moreover, the observations of and interaction with their children were parent-child communication that...
allowed the participants to reexamine their learning experiences and parenting approaches.

Giving Positive Reinforcement

The participants shared that they gave positive reinforcement to their children when their children showed the artworks they made in class. Additionally, some participants mentioned their children wanted to make the art projects they did in the class. Therefore, the participants provided art supplies to encourage their children to reinforce the learning experiences.

IC shared a typical interaction with her daughter after IC picked her up from out-of-school art programs. Her daughter loved to share her artwork and the details of the class, and IC would ask more follow-up questions to encourage her daughter to talk more about the art class. To further enhance positive art learning experiences, IC always had papers and pens for her daughter to doodle and sketch.

She [IC’s daughter] likes to ask me: “Guess what I did today?” She loves to share her works, and she values them a lot. So, I would try to ask some follow-up questions and encourage her to talk more. She would share many details about the class, including what the teachers said and the art supplies...I always have pens and paper with me. So, I will let her doodle while we are waiting for friends. She is pretty used to this. (IC, in-person interview, July 12, 2019)

ZY mentioned that his son was very confident about his artwork, and he was always excited to show the work to ZY whenever he had the artwork completed. ZY also asked his son for details about the artwork, such as medium that was used, which helped to reinforce his son’s art learning experiences.

All the art projects have a theme. For example, if it happens to be Father’s Day or Mother’s Day, they would make an artwork related to the holiday…my son is always excited when he brings his work home. He would show me his work right away and introduce what he did in class. I would ask him to tell me more about his work, like, what materials he used, and he would start talking. He is confident about his artwork. (ZY, in-person interview, July 16, 2019)
Although MY did not directly do art with her children, she supported her children’s art learning by verbally encouraging them and providing supplies when they wanted to create art. For instance, MY asked her children what they learned from class when she picked them up. Also, she noticed that her children liked to do art projects they learned from class again at home. With that in mind, she provided similar art supplies so her children could continue the art project to reinforce their learning experiences.

I would ask them, what did you do today? What did you learn today? Or, did you make any friends in the class? I also noticed that the day after they made the clay sculpture in class, they asked me to take out Play-Doh because they wanted to make something. I think it might be because they just learned about using clay, so they want to play with it. They made ice cream, and I think they applied what they had learned from class to their work. Yeah, they would say: “The teacher said that you are going to roll it out first, and then fold it into half,” something like that. I also noticed that they learned about colors because they would say: “Mom, do you know what color you will get if you mix yellow and red?” I think they found it interesting, so they repeatedly asked me those questions they had just learned, and they wanted to practice them at home. (MY, in-person interview, July 9, 2019)

ML also shared her observation of her two daughters’ interactions. She noticed that they spontaneously did art projects at home by applying what they had learned from the out-of-school art programs.

They did a lot of 3D projects in the out-of-school art programs. So, I collected many boxes for them, and they made a lot of interesting things at home…they would say: “let’s make an airplane” and start making a plan, like, you are going to collect the tools and I’m going to cut this off. (ML, in-person interview, July 14, 2019)

SL liked to do crafts at home, and her son was immersed in the environment in which doing crafts and making art was encouraged. SL believed that children learned and were motivated by observing what parents did. She further stated that parents should be sensitive to children’s needs and support them emotionally and physically to help them develop self-esteem and interests.
I love DIY, like making a storage drawer out of shoe boxes. My kids have seen me do all kinds of projects, and I let them play with art supplies and make stuff ever since they were little...yesterday, my son saw me was making a storage drawer, and he also made one for himself...parents need to pay attention to what kids might need, and then encourage them to try. It is significant to encourage them, support them, and be present in order to help them develop confidence because young kids tend to get distracted or give up easily. (SL, in-person interview, July 22, 2019)

The participants utilized different positive reinforcement approaches to encourage their children. For example, they praised when their children showed them artwork and encouraged children to express what they think of their work. Moreover, some participants prepared art supplies for their children when they wanted to create art at home so the children could practice what they had learned at the out-of-school art programs. These actions and words reinforced their children’s interest in art.

Communicating Intentions with Children and Enhancing Visual Experiences

The participants shared approaches for communicating with and inspiring their children to do art. For example, when ML sensed her children’s reluctance to go to the class, she thoughtfully explained why she placed them in the out-of-school programs. Also, KY took her children to visit museums because she believed the museum environment and its visual stimulation could inspire children’s imagination and encourage them to express ideas.

ML noticed that her younger daughter struggled with adapting to a new learning environment. Although she understood her children had different interests and temperaments, she believed that providing equal opportunities for both her children was necessary in the beginning. Therefore, ML always encouraged her younger daughter to try out a new activity or program at least one time before deciding whether she wanted to continue the program.

I feel that my daughter tends to be reluctant when meeting new people and trying new
things. I always told her that I wanted to offer her the same opportunities her older sister had and decide whether she wanted to continue the programs after she tried them. I don’t want her to regret missing the opportunities. Now she’s gotten older and is more willing to try without my coaxing.  (ML, in-person interview, July 14, 2019)

Taking children to visit museums and seeing exhibitions was essential to KY. She encouraged her children to interpret the art because her children’s interpretations showed unique viewpoints that might be more interesting than adults’ perspectives. KY also noticed that her children tended to be more interested in museum exhibitions when they were younger. This was also another factor why KY wanted to have her children visit as many museums as they can.

I love to take my kids to visit museums. I don’t think they fully understand the content, but they have their interpretations, which is great. It doesn’t matter if their interpretations are correct because that is the way how they see the world. But I noticed that they are getting impatient with seeing exhibitions as they get older. Also, their school doesn’t have any assignments or classes that support this, so I feel it is a shame that they lost some good opportunities. (KY, in-person interview, July 17, 2019)

According to the participants’ narratives, their parent-child dynamic included three aspects: Observing their children’s needs to adjust their parenting approaches, giving positive reinforcement to their children and communicating their intentions with their children, and enhancing children’s visual experiences. To learn children’s needs, the participants carefully observed their children’s behaviors, which helped them to empathize with their children’s position. They also encouraged their children to express ideas and thoughts about the artworks to cultivate their confidence. Furthermore, attentively communicating with children significantly aided in developing a positive parent-child dynamic because the children could feel respected and heard. Encouraging children to engage with art was further positive reinforcement of the children’s interest in art.
Descriptions of Parent-Child-Teacher Dynamic in Art Class

The dynamic among the parents, children, and teachers represented the microsystems in the out-of-school art programs. The parent-participants were invited to sit in the room and observe the class. For the younger group class, the parents were invited to be appropriately involved in the projects with their children, but helping children complete the projects was not encouraged. For the older groups, the parents tended to sit around the parents’ table and observe the teacher-student interactions.

Class Climate Influences Children’s Learning

According to the participants’ observations, the interpersonal dynamic was key to influencing children’s willingness to attend class. In other words, the student-student interactions and the student-teacher interactions were more significant factors than the learning content. For example, the teachers’ body and verbal language and how they handle children’s behaviors directly influenced the class atmosphere. Additionally, the influence of peer scaffolding helped children to engage in class activities. Aside from the student-teacher interactions, parents also played a vital role that emotionally and physically supported their children’s learning in class.

MY noticed it was difficult to tell whether children were drawn to specific out-of-school programs because many external factors might influence their responses and behavior. In MY’s experience, she had to carefully determine the possible factors when her children had negative responses toward a class and decide whether the children should continue the program.

According to my observation about my kids and other kids who are the same age, basically, they won’t say no to going to out-of-school programs. If they were whiny, it was often because the room was too hot or they got thirsty or hungry. I feel that doing art or other projects in class is like playing to them. Also, the teachers know how to handle
children, and they have classmates to play with. So, I would say the majority of kids at this age like to go to most of the out-of-school programs. If they showed that they didn’t like it, often, it was because of people or personal reasons, not the class content. For example, they might be too shy or because their best friends were not in the class. (MY, in-person interview, July 9, 2019)

JL described the class set-up. There was a primary teacher and assistant teachers in the class. Additionally, the student group was made of some returning students and new students. The returning students played a significant role because they helped the new students adapt to the environment and class agenda.

Normally, one primary art teacher and 1-2 assistant teachers will be there. Also, there are many returning students in the class, and they know the routine very well. Every time the teachers ask or say something, they respond right away. I think it is great to have both returning students and new students in one class because the new students can quickly learn from the returning students by observing them. (JL, in-person interview, July 11, 2019)

ML shared her observation about her child’s learning experiences in the out-of-school art program. She noticed that her son preferred the story-telling activities rather than the actual art creation activities because storytelling was more interactive and compelling. As parents, ML and her husband had to be cheerleaders and encourage their child to do art during the class period.

He [ML’s son] loves stories and jokes, so he would be very engaged when the teachers were telling stories or jokes. But when he starts doing art or learning knowledge or concepts about art, he tends to space out and seems not interested in it. Sometimes he would need his dad to sit with him and be a cheerleader to him or even help him. Yeah, he needs company to complete the art project. (ML, in-person interview, July 14, 2019)

SH believed that that persistence is essential to both parenting and to children’s learning. She mentioned that parents had to firmly follow their educational goals and keep children on track, especially when they encountered their children’s reluctance to participate in class.

Additionally, when selecting an out-of-school program, SH emphasized whether the teacher liked children as the most important criterion because it fundamentally influenced teachers’
teaching quality and interactions with children in the class.

There was a difficult time for both my kids and me. They didn’t want to go to any of the classes during that period. They didn’t want to participate in the class activity and just kept crying. So, as a mother, I must toughen up. Because I know these learning experiences were vital to them and appropriate to their age, I have to hang in there and persist in going to the classes. I believe that eventually, those experiences would internalize and become an essential part of their development…as far as the art teachers, I would say the most important criterion is whether they like kids. Parents can easily sense it if the teacher teaches the class without putting affection in the class. Um, it is just my personal opinion, and I can tell if the teachers like their job or not by observing their interactions with kids. (SH, in-person interview, July 15, 2019)

The participants agreed that both the teachers and the students played a critical role in creating a positive learning environment. The interpersonal dynamic seemed to be the primary factor influencing children’s learning experiences in the out-of-school art program. Furthermore, parents who sit in the class can also play an essential role in supporting their children’s learning, especially for younger children who might need parents’ assistance.

**Everyone Plays a Role in Class**

According to the participants’ descriptions, one of the characteristics of the art program was the class included activities and art creation that made children feel like they were playing. The activities involved role playing that allowed children to engage in the group. Additionally, parents and children who sat in the class but did not directly participate in the activities also played a part as audiences.

JL’s children had tried several out-of-school art programs before JL learned about the out-of-school art program through social media. Compared to other programs, she appreciated that the teacher gave students room to explore all kinds of art styles and methods and incorporated stories into the lesson that her children enjoyed a lot. JL highly emphasized teachers’ educational
philosophy, which profoundly influen
d their teaching approaches and children’s art learning experiences. She stressed that children’s temperament was also a significant factor needed to consider when selecting an art program. For example, JL’s children loved to listen to a story before creating, and they liked their teacher to operate the class by playing games. Therefore, JL and her children kept returning to the same program every semester because she believed the teacher’s teaching method suited her children the best.

I saw someone share some clips of the art class on Facebook, so I searched for their website and found out their program is in Taipei. So, I gave it a try...I feel that teachers’ educational philosophy impacts their teaching approaches and students’ artworks. In fact, I also considered other well-known out-of-school art programs. But my kids are very naughty [laugh], so I decided to place them in this program because the class structure included a lot of playing, storytelling, and acting. So my kids love it a lot... my kids’ art class in school tends to be traditional, so they prefer out-of-school art classes because it is so much fun and better motivates them to do art. (JL, in-person interview, July 11, 2019)

According to JL, parents can sit in the classroom and observe the class activities. Sometimes she and her younger son stayed and watched her older daughter’s class. She noticed that even though her son did not directly participate in the class, he still learned some things by observing. In addition, JL noticed that many parents carefully observed the class, and some even took notes about it.

The classroom is spacious, and parents are welcome to stay and observe their children and the class. Some parents are big fans of the program, and they even take notes in the class...Sometimes my son and I sat in the room while my daughter was in class. I noticed that my son paid attention to some weird details. For example, one time, the teacher played a K-pop music video, and he said: the background is like what the teacher said, many repeated images with different colors. I didn’t know what he was talking about until later my daughter explained that he was mentioning the teachers introduced Andy Warhol in one lesson. (JL, in-person interview, July 11, 2019)

SH placed her children in an out-of-school art program when the children were just under three. Because the children were at a young age, SH participated in the class with them and observed the class interactions at the same time. She described that the art class went beyond
making art because the teacher incorporated role-playing and art creation together, and this approach was appealing to her.

They start going to out-of-school programs since they were two years and eight months old. I’m the primary caregiver and take care of both of them, and I took them to all kinds of classes so that everyone has something to do. I sat in the classes because they were so young...the teachers introduced artists and their artworks, and then they use a similar approach to create art. For example, one lesson was about Jackson Pollock, and the kids used his drip technique of pouring or splashing paints to create art. Another excellent lesson was about graffiti art. They used giant canvas as a wall and painted some things on it. The teacher pretended to be a police officer, and all the kids were graffiti artists. When the police whistled, the kids had to hide and wait until the police were gone. It was such a fun class! (SH, in-person interview, July 15, 2019)

According to the participants’ descriptions, one of the characteristics of the art program was the class included activities and art creation that made children feel like they were playing. The activities involved role playing that allowed children to engage socially, creatively and artistically in the group. Additionally, parents and children who sat in the class but did not directly participate in the activities also played a role as audiences.

Parent-Participants’ Reflective Thought

The parent-participants’ reflective thoughts focused on five facets: description of their educational philosophy, perspectives of art, purposes for placing their children in out-of-school art programs, description of the art program, and description of their children’s art productions. The parents’ educational philosophy was the core of their parenting style and influenced how they perceived art education, which impacted their intentions and purposes for selecting out-of-school art programs for their children. According to the participants, children’s mental wellness, learning attitudes and interpersonal relationship development, physical wellness, and parental presence were the four foci they emphasized the most. Moreover, the participants’ perspectives
of art included art helping individuals’ expression and supporting emotional well-being as well as art being an essential part of individuals’ life experiences.

When selecting out-of-school art programs, the participants emphasized three considerations: their work and family schedules, children’s interests, and enhancement of children’s development and learning. According to the participants’ descriptions of the art program, four characteristics appealed to them: encouragement of parental presence, incorporation of multiple instruction methods, encouragement to explore various mediums and visual representations, and incorporation of community resources and collaboration with local schools. Furthermore, the participants described their children’s art productions, focusing on children’s reactions and creation process. The children loved to show their work and verbally share the details, children’s desire to do art was enhanced after attending the art classes, and the children preferred flexible and diverse learning content.

**Descriptions of Educational Philosophy**

According to the participants’ narratives, their educational philosophy included four aspects. The first was about children’s mental wellness. They believed that individuals with good mental health could handle stress better when encountering challenges. To achieve this goal, they encouraged their children to do art because artistic creation helped them express feelings and communicate ideas. Also, positive memories about art creation were important emotional nutrition that sustained their well-being. Second, the participants emphasized their children’s learning attitude and interpersonal relationship development. They believed that learning and doing art can cultivate children’s persistence and responsibility. Also, having good manners and interacting with peers and teachers in art class was an excellent way to learn socialization. Third,
the children’s physical wellness was another of the participants’ parenting priorities. They believed that doing art contributed to the children’s physical development because different activities (e.g., holding tools, practicing techniques) helped develop fine motor skills. Last, parental presence was the key to strengthening a positive and close parent-child relationship and supporting the children emotionally.

**Having Good Mental Wellness**

The participants stressed the importance of mental wellness, which is vital at every stage of life from childhood and adolescence through adulthood. This included emotional, psychological, and social well-being development as well as the ability to handle stress and to cope with and manage change and uncertainty. To achieve good mental well-being, the participants believed that doing art is an excellent approach that helps children feel, express, and manage both positive and negative emotions.

MY stressed that developing interests was significant to individuals, and this was one of the reasons she placed her children in a variety of out-of-school programs. MY’s thought came from her own school-time experiences. Growing up in a very competitive learning environment, she noted that students cannot practically master all subjects in school. She also knew that experiencing failure might harm children’s self-esteem and their learning motivation. Therefore, she believed it was crucial to have something, such as interests, that children love and devote their time to because it can help them feel empowered.

They went to science, clay, and basketball classes, and they will go to karate this afternoon [laugh]. I want them to try many different programs. It would be great if they find it interesting…according to my learning experiences, I know the feeling of frustration because of failure, such as getting a bad grade and being laughed at by peers. If they were not interested in those subjects, that would be fine because no expectation,
no harm. What I am concerned about the most is that if they don’t find anything they like, they might get lost easily and suffer. (MY, in-person interview, July 9, 2019)

JL believed that mental health was the most significant thing to individual development. She stressed that although financial security was essential to living, life would be meaningless without a healthy mental status to keep individuals moving forward and overcoming obstacles. JL further explained that being interested in doing something can bring joy to individuals and help moderate unstable or negative experiences.

Um, I think, they have to learn how to get their lives going. I mean spiritual and mental aspects of their lives. Of course, the financial part is essential. But, if they don’t have some things, like an internal force, that can support their mental health, they might be depressed when they encounter a rough patch or obstacles. So, it is important to have a positive force, like art, that can hold them. Also, what they have gained from the out-of-school art program is more than art techniques. The happy memories from the classes can also help calm them down. (JL, in-person interview, July 11, 2019)

YW also believed that having the internal motivation to do something was essential to child development because when children gravitated toward their interests, they tended to be more engaged and active. YW was aware of the time children might take to explore and find their interests. As parents, YW and her husband recognized that although parents’ schedules and decisions were prioritized when children were young, empathizing with children’s feelings and providing as much support as possible were also significant.

I feel that if children are interested in some things, they will do it spontaneously without forcing them to do it. But their teacher also mentioned that not every kid shows a clear interest during this stage. Also, he is still too young to develop a specific interest. So, it is still a long way to go… I believe that being empathetic and being present is the most important. My husband and I try to work out the best way to take both children’s needs and our schedules and resources into account. Also, if they find out something that they like and are interested in, we will try our best to support them. (YW, in-person interview, July 16, 2019)

ZL shared his experience of growing up in an environment in which developing interests was not encouraged. He grew up surrounded by an ideology that pursuing arts was not
considered a path that people could make good money from, and often arts were viewed as just a hobby or interest. Because of these experiences, ZL felt that parents should encourage children to explore their interests and try different opportunities because encountering new difficulties can help individuals develop problem-solving skills.

The GSAT significantly shaped my learning experiences. If we simply look at the result, yes, I’ve gotten a job with a decent salary. But the issue is that the most trendy or money-making fields tend to be the top choices when students select programs or majors in college. It goes without saying that this phenomenon impacts the GSAT and students’ learning in high school. To be honest, I’m not interested in computer science at all, but I still chose it because computer science was the most popular subject when I was in high school. That is why I feel that if kids show interest in some things, as parents, we should fully support them. Even if they find out that things don’t work out as they expected, they will still be willing to try something else. I don’t want to see that kids are forced to give up on some things before trying. I would rather see them hit the ground but get up to see what’s next because no one learns without making mistakes. So, yeah, parents’ mindset is critical. (ZL, in-person interview, July 17, 2019)

SY placed her children in several out-of-school programs because she believed those experiences helped children’s eye-hand coordination and fine motor skills development. SY also stressed the importance of mental health because it influenced every aspect of individuals’ lives, including their future careers. Moreover, she believed that parents should encourage children to find something they love and pursue the life they enjoy.

Basically, I observe their temperament and see what they might be interested in, and then let them try it out...physical and mental health is the most important aspect to child development. I believe that having a healthy mental status can help him to be the person he wants to be, find some things he is interested in, choose a career that he likes, and be a confident individual. Yeah, that is what I want for our kids. We will always support them regardless of what kind of life they choose to lead and what job they take. (SY, in-person interview, July 18, 2019)

To ZY, having good manners, good memories, and good health were the most important foci for parenting. ZY and his wife believed that having good childhood memories was important for their children, so they emphasized having quality time and family trips with their
children, especially when their children were young. ZY further explained that although children’s academic performance seemed to be the top priority for many parents, he believed that individual value and achievement were not necessarily influenced by academic performance in school. To ZY, being mentally and physically healthy should be prioritized over accomplishment.

I care about their [Zy’s children] manners the most, and having good childhood memories is also important. I take them to do outdoor activities or visit museums because I want them to explore as many things as possible before they get into middle school. When they get into middle and high school, they might need to sacrifice their leisure time for studying because of the pressure of schoolwork and the GSAT. That is why my wife and I think we should at least have one family trip per year, such as traveling to different countries or having a long domestic travel time. We want our kids to have more good memories with family. Um, academic performance-wise, in fact, that is not a concern to me because I think individuals’ school grades and their future accomplishments do not necessarily relate. (ZY, in-person interview, July 16, 2019)

Many participants mentioned being successful in academic performance or careers creates stress for people. Therefore, they believed that supporting their children to explore art and other fields and have more good memories in childhood can prepare them to confront the challenges they will face in the future.

**Having Positive Learning Attitude and Interpersonal Relationships**

Some participants emphasized that cultivating children’s good learning attitudes and interpersonal relationships were essential to child development. Specifically, being persistent, being responsible, having good manners, and interacting appropriately with people were the participants’ foci. According to the participants, those qualities helped children be prosocial individuals who can build good relationships with others.

One of MY’s purposes for placing her children in out-of-school programs was because she believed interacting with peers and learning perseverance were essential processes of child
development. MY cared if her children were persistent and steadfast more than whether her children learned a specific skill from the class. She explained that getting along in unpleasant situations or learning things that might not be the most interesting was significant for young children because it helped them gradually understand how the real-world functions.

My primary goal is about persistence, like if they [MY’s children] can complete the program. It doesn’t matter if they didn’t thoroughly learn the content or didn’t do excellent works because those are supplemental objectives. Like my son, who loves art and soccer, he still needs to learn Bopomofo\(^2\), which is his least favorite class. He has to know that sometimes he has to complete certain tasks even though they might not be his favorites. I think this is a process of socialization. Through the programs, they [MY’s children] learn how to interact with different people and persistence. (MY, in-person interview, July 9, 2019)

In addition to interest development, MY also emphasized that she cared about her children’s manners and polite attitude. MY believed that children’s manners can significantly influence their interpersonal interactions, which is essential to child development. To MY, developing personal interests and good manners are closely connected because interests can support individuals when they are alone, and manners helped them to socialize with people while engaged in those interests.

I care about their manner and if they sleep well and eat well. Attitude is the most important thing. Other than this, like learning, they will know it after they get into school. If they like a subject, they will naturally do it well; if they don’t like it, they won’t do it, even if you force them to do it. So, my thought is that I let them try different out-of-school programs, and hopefully, they will find some things that they like. And they can do it on their own…another is about interpersonal relationships. Such as knowing how to interact with teachers and peers appropriately. (MY, in-person interview, July 9, 2019)

SL cared about discipline and a responsible attitude. She explained that many children were over-protected by their parents, which might cause the children to lack social skills. To SL,

\(^2\) Bopomofo, also named Zhuyin or Mandarin Phonetic Symbols, is a major Chinese transliteration system for Mandarin Chinese and other related languages and dialects most commonly used in Taiwanese Mandarin.
participating in group activities is vital to child development. In addition, one of SL’s parenting goals was to help her children be independent and responsible individuals who can take care of themselves. Moreover, SL mentioned her parents, who were very kind to everyone, and their moral characters influenced SL’s viewpoint and parenting style. Therefore, being kind was another essential characteristic she wanted her children to learn.

I think having discipline is vital to children, such as being on time and responsible. Children these days are very well protected by their parents, and they might not be independent until college. Through attending out-of-school programs, they can learn how to interact with people and work with others as a team…my parenting goal is that I want my kids to be able to take good care of themselves when they grow up. So, parents should not overprotect their children. Also, I want them to be kind and good people because my parents are good people, too. (SY, in-person interview, July 18, 2019)

SL also pointed out that parents should be very clear about their parenting goals. She noted that because information about parenting was easy to access and flowed quickly, parents can feel overwhelmed by abundant resources and therefore struggle with information selection.

Furthermore, SL said she used to be like many parents who focused on specific developmental criteria, such as language learning and leadership temperament. Now SL believed that parents should give children space to explore their interests and themselves, but certain parenting principles still needed to be followed, such as being polite and having good manners.

Information is flowing rapidly these days. You can find all kinds of parenting information everywhere, such as suggestions and programs… It is crucial to have your own educational and parenting goals, otherwise, you might get lost easily…when my kids were younger, I wanted them to speak English fluently and be active in groups. Now I feel that every kid has a different temperament and characteristics, and I want them to be the person they want to be. Um, I feel that parents should support their children as much as possible. But I’m still rigorous toward their manners. They can do what they like, but they can’t bother other people, which is my principle. (SL, in-person interview, July 22, 2019)

The participants agreed that having a positive learning attitude and interpersonal relationships were the foundation of individuals’ social development. They believed that
attending an out-of-school art program was an excellent approach to fulfill the above purpose. Specifically, the children would learn to interact with peers and teachers in class and overcome challenges and complete the tasks.

**Having Good Physical Wellness**

To many participants, physical wellness was also a focus. They mentioned that physical development-related out-of-school programs were popular options, such as movement, eurhythmics, and sports. Some participants believed that doing art also contributed to children’s physical wellness because it helps develop fine motor skills that allow children to complete daily life tasks.

MY shared an observation about child development commonly shared among parent groups. She noticed that many parents believed gross motor skills should be developed before fine motor skills, so their first choice of out-of-school programs for their young children was movement- and eurhythmics-related programs. On the other hand, because fine motor skills involve using smaller muscles, such as grasping, object manipulation, and drawing, visual art-related programs tended to be their second choice. Additionally, MY mentioned that motor skill development seemed to be a dominant discourse in media and among parents. This discourse was further synthesized with creativity by some out-of-school programs, which ultimately created pressure for parents like MY, who might not think placing children in such programs was necessary.

I feel sport, bodily movement- and eurhythmics-related programs are very common, and art isn’t really the primary choice for many parents. Um, I should say, everyone says that children develop their gross motor skills first and then gradually move on to fine motor skills development. Also, teachers and media keep emphasizing the importance of this developmental concept. So, almost every program, such as sport and swimming
programs, highlights their specialties or focuses on children’s physical development. They tend to use slogans such as coordination is essential to every child, etc. Many parents would buy them as long as the programs can connect those concepts with their class. Um, it also causes a phenomenon. If I didn’t place my children in such bodily movement-related programs, they might question me: why don’t you try this to help your kids develop their muscle and creativity?” etc., and then I have to debate it in my mind. (MY, in-person interview, July 9, 2019)

On the other hand, SY, a physical therapist, stressed the importance of children’s physical development. Her son started attending out-of-school art programs when he was four years old because she believed those classes could help him practice eye-hand coordination and fine motor skills.

They [SY’s children] went dancing and played table tennis before because I’m a physical therapist, and I know children’s eye-hand coordination is important. Also, learning to be focused is vital too. So, he [SY’s son] has been in an out-of-school art program since he was four because I thought doing art is a great way to practice his fine motor skills. (SY, in-person interview, July 18, 2019)

JL also emphasized her children’s physical health and insisted her children should keep a regular work-out schedule. She claimed that doing schoolwork has occupied most of her children’s time, and they needed to do workouts to keep their health.

My children have tried many sport-related programs. In fact, they didn’t show a great interest in a specific subject. Because they know that taking these classes makes them healthy, so they have to do it [laugh]…they have a lot of schoolwork, which has occupied most of their time, so they have to block out a time for exercising. (JL, in-person interview, July 11, 2019)

IC believed that parents should create a safe and encouraging environment in which children can explore, play, and cultivate autonomy. She further explained the best way to support children’s autonomy was to prepare proper resources, including tangible and intangible resources. For example, parents should encourage their children to try different tasks and challenges and guide them to find solutions instead of direct intervention in children’s actions.

When kids are young, the most important thing for them is playing. As adults, we have to
play with them and be interesting adults. Also, the environment is essential. We have to prepare a proper and safe space for them to explore and develop. For example, if kids are doing potty training, parents should prepare a small chair or staircase for them, so they will feel that they can complete a task on their own. I also discuss the environment set up with my daughter, like what is this for? Is it safe to put this here? Try putting the stuff that she needs at the place she can reach. By doing so, kids can actually develop pretty well. Another thing I think is also very important is that parents should avoid making any judgments about their artworks. I know it is hard for many parents because kids might keep asking what you think of their works. But we have to use different approaches, such as giving more positive and constructive feedback and encouragement. Or, I tend to turn the question back to her and ask her: what do you think of your work? Which part of your work do you like the most? (IC, in-person interview, July 12, 2019)

Several participants mentioned that helping children develop their gross/fine motor skills was one of the reasons they placed their children in art and sport-related programs. This concept of gross/fine motor skills development seems to be a dominant discourse among parents with young children. Additionally, the participants believed that children should be physically active and exercise regularly to maintain good physical health.

**Parental Presence**

The participants emphasized the importance of parental presence because they believed it was the key to strengthening a positive and close parent-child relationship. Moreover, they believed that parents participating in children’s events and having quality time together can benefit children’s mental well-being and have a life-long influence on children.

SH stated that the family’s influence on an individual’s growth is long-lasting. Both SH and YW believed that empathizing with children’s feelings and providing as much support as possible were significant for developing a positive parent-child relationship; therefore, being good company and empathetic were the most critical features of parenting for profoundly influencing their children’s development.
A person’s original family has a life-long impact on them. I feel all the issues that happened to individuals can be traced back to their childhood. That is why I believe parents’ roles and being present is the most significant. To me, the most important elements in parenting are to be present and empathetic. (SH, in-person interview, July 15, 2019)

I believe that being empathetic and being present are the most important. My husband and I try to work out the best way to take both children’s needs and our schedule and resources into account. Also, if they find out something that they like and are interested in, we will try our best to support them. (YW, in-person interview, July 16, 2019)

ZL mentioned that aside from supporting children to develop their interests, parents should carefully find a balance between being hands-on and hands-off. He explained that although it was necessary to respect children’s autonomy, parents’ intervention was essential, especially to cultivate children’s perseverance. Additionally, ZL highly valued family interactions and connections. He contended children’s pleasant childhood memories were significant because those memories would be carried throughout their lives, so he always made time for his children and was present.

Giving kids a happy childhood is important. After they get into middle school, nothing can make them happy because of the pressure of academic performance. I hope they can be happy and try everything they want to try before entering middle school. Because after they tried it, they would know whether they liked it or not. Of course, we have to respect their willingness, but we can’t just totally be hands-off, and we need to guide them to persist in completing any project…I also want them to have a close relationship with their family. That is why parents being present is significant. The more often you keep company with kids, the stronger the connection between kids and their families will become. For example, if dad is busy with work and isn’t present at his children’s events, the bond between children and dad might loosen when they grow up, and I don’t want to see that happen…Also, I want them to be polite and kind individuals who know how to interact with people appropriately. (ZL, in-person interview, July 17, 2019)

Parental presence supports children emotionally and enhances a positive parent-child relationship. Some participants believed that the most critical aspects of parenting are parental presence and empathy. Additionally, the participants stressed that parents should spend more time with their children – especially when children are young – because childhood is a critical
period that might shape individuals’ personalities and have a long-term influence.

**Perspectives of Art**

The participants’ perspectives of art included two domains. First, they believed art helps individuals’ expression and supports emotional well-being. Specifically, they stated that children communicate their feelings and thoughts through art and that the process of art creation heals their negative emotions and helps them overcome adversity. Second, the participants considered art to be an essential part of individuals’ life experiences. Creating and appreciating art can enrich people’s minds and visual literacy and bring aesthetic pleasure to individual and societal levels.

**Art Helps Emotional Support and Expression**

According to the participants, art benefits mental well-being because it supports and strengthens children’s emotional development and helps them be resilient when facing adversity. Additionally, they considered art creation to be a channel that allows individuals to express feelings and helps young children communicate thoughts.

JL viewed art as a means to broaden one’s viewpoints and spark joy in life. She explained that the traditional categories of disciplines did not reflect real-life experiences or help individuals find the meaning of life. JL noted that art can help them express their feelings or bring joyful memories to lighten up their lives especially when individuals encounter hardship.

I don’t think my children are gifted in art, but I thought at least they have to learn how to appreciate arts. I’m not expecting them to become artists. I just feel that if they are limited by traditional school subjects, their future might be dull and bland and become unhappy… But, if they don’t have some things, like an internal force, that can support
their mental health, they might be depressed when they encounter a rough patch or obstacles. So, it is important to have a positive force, like art, that can hold them. Also, what they have gained from the out-of-school art program is more than art techniques. The happy memories from the classes can also help calm them down. (JL, in-person interview, July 11, 2019)

SY also mentioned that art creation and emotional development might be related. She noticed that her children expressed their feelings by doodling on their notebooks. She further emphasized that parents should be more supportive regarding children’s interests in art instead of imposing a developmental direction on them because it might diminish their potential in such interests.

I notice that he takes notes by doing sketches sometimes. I also think that art relates to emotional development. For example, he doodles on his notebooks when he feels bored or sad. It is like turning this feeling into art, which is why I think art can be a great channel to express feelings and be a lifelong companion…I feel that many kids have a talent for art and are also interested in art. But often, their talent is depleted by the frame that parents set up. (SY, in-person interview, July 18, 2019)

KY believed that every individual has the inner desire to create art. According to her observation of her children, she noticed that her children were eager to communicate ideas through drawing and showed passion about sharing their works with her. KY loved encouraging her children to express themselves through doodling.

I feel that humans inherently desire to do art because that is a primitive way of expression. Like my kids, they started doodling ever since they were little. They might draw a random line and tell you what it is. I feel they are so precious and adorable when they do this. I don’t want them to draw some things realistic, I prefer they go wild with their imagination. So, I always like to ask them, what is this? And they always excitedly introduce their works and want to give them to me as a gift. (KY, in-person interview, July 17, 2019)

The participants valued art as the healing of individuals’ emotions and a tool for communicating. They believed that the desire to create art is inherent. They suggested that although not everyone needs to be an artist, appreciating art allows individuals to be more open-minded and can help individuals calm down when they feel loneliness, anger, and sadness.
Art as Daily Experiences and Literacy

The participants considered art to be an essential part of individuals’ life experiences. They believed that art could enrich individuals’ minds and lives, elevate the public’s visual literacy, and create an aesthetic living environment.

ML believed art is part of life experiences. She described art as essential emotional or spiritual nutrition to individuals. Specifically, art helped people discover the beauty and joy of everyday life and maintain mental health. She incorporated art into her children’s schedules, including attending out-of-school art programs and regularly visiting museums.

I believe that art is part of our daily life. Of course, it would be great if my kids were gifted, so art could be their future career. But, to be honest, I don’t think my kids have such talent or are interested in art. So, what I’m doing is to incorporate art into our family routine. Like, I take them to museums regularly, and I place them into out-of-school art programs…like a healthy and balanced diet, art is essential nutrition to their life. I want art to become part of their daily life because art can help them find the beauty of life, be open-minded, and have a good mood. (ML, in-person interview, July 14, 2019)

KY also stressed that art education is essential to young children, and she often took her children to visit museums to expose them to art and cultivate their sense of aesthetics. From her perspective, she felt aesthetic and art education should be emphasized more in the school system because art sparks joy that allows people to appreciate every moment of life.

I think it is important to have art education beginning in the pre-school stage because I feel that Taiwan still has a long way to go in terms of aesthetic education [laugh]. I’ve liked taking my kids to visit museums since they were little. They might not understand the concepts and what they saw, but they would say: mom, I think what they are doing is XYZ. I think it is great because they have their interpretation. It doesn’t matter if their interpretations are correct because that is the way how they see the world. But I noticed that they are getting impatient with seeing exhibitions as they get older. Also, their school doesn’t have any assignments or classes that support this, so I feel it is a shame that they lost some good opportunities…if they can appreciate things surrounding them, their lives will be rich and full of fun. It doesn’t matter where they are, or perhaps they are sitting in a corner, they can always notice exciting or beautiful things. I guess I don’t like kids who are whining about being bored because I think if they got bored, that was because they
didn’t see the exciting aspects of an object. (KY, in-person interview, July 17, 2019)

SH saw the core value of art as enriching minds. She believed that people who have an enriched mind have a wealthier perception of life. She also shared that she was immersed in an art-enriched environment while she was studying abroad in New York. Her time in New York motivated her to pursue a costume design degree after she came back to Taiwan. Although she did not complete the degree, taking art-related courses made her feel emotionally enriched. Those experiences shaped why she believed parents should expose their children to art.

I believe the value of art is to enrich individuals’ minds. Even though they [SH’s children] might not become artists, they will be spiritually wealthier than others. Oh, one thing I forgot to mention. After I came back from the US, I felt that New York inspired me: you can do whatever you want to do regardless of your age. So, I told myself, I wanted to do costume design. But I didn’t finish my degree because the reality was that you have to start your career by doing a design assistant job, which has very low pay…but I still think that what I have learned from the costume design program changed me a lot. Because I used to study science in college, I felt I wasn’t exposed to art enough. So, I believe that was a great experience, and this is also one of the reasons why I want my children to learn arts. (SH, in-person interview, July 15, 2019)

ZY believed that art could be an individuals’ life-long companion because art can help with expression. He further mentioned that everyone could draw and paint with basic art supplies, which can be easy to carry when traveling.

My wife and I believe that learning art is great, even better than learning music. You need to continuously practice the musical instrument so that you won’t forget how to play it. But drawing and painting are like, if you have learned basic skills, they can stay with you lifelong. Also, it is easy to bring a watercolor set or pens with you when you travel, and you can do a quick sketch or painting wherever you like. (ZY, in-person interview, July 16, 2019)

SY noticed that after her children started attending the out-of-school art program, they became more observant and perceptive about the environment surrounding them. This ability further influenced their sensitivity for selecting color schemes for clothing.

I think it is good to place him [SY’s son] in the art program because I notice that he was
not careful about details. Through art creation, he gradually realized that artwork has so many details. It also cultivates his patience…another reason why I placed him in the art program is that I want him to explore and develop his way of seeing art and colors. After he had been in several classes, I noticed that every time we went out, he would pay attention to details and color schemes. So, I think learning art helped cultivate the ability of observation and art appreciation. Gradually, it will become an embedded visual literacy or ability. (SY, in-person interview, July 18, 2019)

The participants valued art as an inseparable part of daily experiences. Their perspectives included perceptual and pragmatic aspects, which suggested many parents’ expectations for art education. In other words, they considered art is a way to elevate people’s spiritual and cognitive demands.

**Intentions and Purposes of Selecting Out-of-School Art Program**

According to the participants’ descriptions, there were three primary considerations for placing their children in out-of-school art programs. The first consideration was about the participants’ work and family schedules. The participants, especially those with full-time jobs, have limited time for taking their children to the class and picking them up. Additionally, children might attend several out-of-school programs during a week, and their parents had to figure out the most convenient class schedule that matched the family’s schedule. Second, whether children show interest in art was a significant indicator that motivated the participants to search for out-of-school programs. For the participants who did not have art-related backgrounds, placing their children in an out-of-school art program seemed reasonable because they believed art learning required professional instruction. The third consideration was about enhancing their children’s development and learning. For example, some participants believed doing art can help children’s fine motor skills development. Others believed that out-of-school programs could offer broader and more in-depth learning to supplement regular school learning.
SL learned about the out-of-school program from a friend. SL’s primary consideration for selecting out-of-school programs was the family’s and work schedules. Another criterion for the selection of out-of-school programs was the programs’ curricula because she was a teacher and emphasized curriculum structures and themes. SL frequently participated in the art class, and she noticed that the teachers applied an interdisciplinary approach to develop the curriculum themes. She valued the art program because of the diverse and interesting themes and the way the teachers interacted with the students.

First, the program’s time has to fit into our schedule. The location shouldn’t be too far away. Also, I think the themes of the class have to be inspiring and interesting. So, I made those decisions for my kids because they were too young to make a decision themselves…I saw some art teachers apply very interesting teaching methods, which I think can be used in my class as well. That is why I like to sit in the class and observe the class…they used a lot of videos and incorporated many other disciplines, such as environmental issues. Also, all the teachers are very nice and are able to empathize with children…overall, I think the schedule and the themes are the two most important criteria when selecting out-of-school programs. (SL, in-person interview, July 22, 2019)

MY learned about the out-of-school programs mainly through the internet. Her primary criterion for selecting an out-of-school program was the schedule needed to be able to fit into her and her husband’s work schedules.

Typically, I have to confirm my schedule first because I have a full-time job. I learned most of the programs from the Internet. Um, also word of mouth. Unlike my friends who might have someone who can pick up their children anytime, I don’t have many options [out-of-school program selection] because of my working schedule. (MY, in-person interview, July 9, 2019)

One of MY’s purposes of placing her children in an out-of-school art program was because her son showed great interest in doing art. She believed art creation helps children communicate and express themselves and noticed her son enjoyed doing art. Because MY did not have an art background, she believed exposing her children to an art-enriched environment where they could interact with and learn from professional art teachers was beneficial to her children’s art learning
experiences.

My son shows a great interest in art, more so than my daughter. For example, we saw an image or something outside, and he would observe it and then come up with an idea and draw it down. Even though it might not look like the subject because he is a kid, he can capture the significant characteristics of the subject. He wants to draw it down when he has an idea in mind. So, I think art is a great approach to express his feelings and communicate his ideas. Also, he seems happy when he is drawing…So, I’m not good at art, but my kid has the talent and interest. So, I think the best way is to place them in an out-of-school art program because they need the environment, instruction, and peer interaction to help their art learning. (MY, in-person interview, July 9, 2019)

YW began to look for out-of-school art programs for her son when he was around three because she noticed that her son loved doodling. She heard about the program from other parents. According to YW’s learning experience in schools, she felt that the education she received in school was fixed and constrained, which limited her imagination as a child. Therefore, she sought out art learning opportunities outside of school because she felt out-of-school art programs should be able to foster creativity better because those programs tended to have more flexible and diverse themes and teaching approaches.

When he [YW’s son] was about two or three years old, we noticed that he loved to grasp markers and doodle. So, we started looking for out-of-school art programs for him…I want him to be creative because my learning experiences were like crammed with stuff and did not support creativity development. So, I was thinking, I want to give him a different learning experience and see if he can be more flexible than me in terms of a creative mindset. So, I heard about this program from other parents in his music class. (YW, in-person interview, July 16, 2019)

JL shared the factors that influenced her decision-making regarding placing her children in out-of-school programs. To JL, the family’s schedule, locations, and fees were the general criteria when selecting programs. She further mentioned that because children might attend several out-of-school programs during the semester, carefully arranging the time and finding a balance that allowed them to have positive learning experiences without over-stretching their schedules was crucial.
First of all, I would check the programs’ location and time. It has to be able to fit in my schedule. The second consideration is the fee. If it is pricey, it won’t work…I also need to consider if my kids can handle that many classes. Because if they get tired, it might impact their mood and learning. And then whether they like it or not is also something that I need to take into account. (JL, in-person interview, July 11, 2019)

The main reason that drove IC to place her daughter in the out-of-school art program was to help with her daughter’s fine motor skill development. IC specialized in child development-related fields. Based on her observation, one effective way to practice fine motor skills was to do something her daughter was interested in. Additionally, IC’s daughter needed an adult’s assistance for some tasks. The art program allowed parents to participate in the art creation activity with their children, which was another reason IC chose this program.

I placed her in the art program to help her with her fine motor skills development. According to my observation, her hands’ developmental issues can easily make her frustrated. So, I think the best way is to practice her fine motor skills by doing what she likes. Also, parents are welcome to sit in, and it is great because she is very shy, and she might not be able to be in the class on her own. Some of her friends from school were also in the class, and it also helped her to get used to the environment quicker. (IC, in-person interview, July 12, 2019)

ML explained that although schools provided foundational learning opportunities, children interested in a specific discipline needed to attend extra or advanced out-of-school programs to strengthen the learning experiences.

What schools can offer are all basic knowledge. We still need to reach out to out-of-school programs for more advanced and in-depth learning. (ML, in-person interview, July 14, 2019)

SH shared a similar perspective with ML. She felt that schools can only offer certain art class types because of time, environment, and budget limitations. Compared to art classes in schools, out-of-school art programs provided more and various themes and mediums for art creation.

I feel out-of-school art programs are very different from school art classes. For example, out-of-school programs tend to offer more art mediums that you can choose from. They also have various themes. Compared to out-of-school art classes, school art classes tend
to have limited supplies and fewer art project options. (SH, in-person interview, July 15, 2019)

The participants’ work and family schedules, children’s interests, and supplemental learning were three significant considerations when selecting out-of-school programs for their children. The participants’ narratives about those considerations indicate how they manage and prioritize their tangible and intangible resources to fulfill their parenting goals.

Descriptions of the Out-of-School Art Program

According to the participants’ descriptions, the out-of-school art program had four primary characteristics. First, parental presence was encouraged. Parents were welcome to sit in the class and observe because it strengthened parental involvement and supported their children emotionally. Second, the teachers incorporated multiple instruction methods, such as storytelling, role-play, and modeling, which created a positive learning environment. Third, the teachers encouraged students to explore various mediums and visual representations. The art curricula included many interdisciplinary themes to cultivate students’ creativity. Four, the program incorporated community resources and collaborated with local schools so students had opportunities to get involved in group art creation.

According to JL, the art teachers at the out-of-school art program utilized storytelling as a strategy to motivate students to engage in the art creation process. Additionally, JL noticed that the teachers connected the story with the theme of the art project to reinforce students’ learning experiences. JL described that the characteristics and structure of the class were influenced by the teachers’ educational philosophy, which can be shown in the teaching approaches and students’ performance. Moreover, the teachers provided rich visual resources as references when
student created their artwork and further guided them to think outside of the box, such as creatively modifying the composition of the visual resources when utilizing them. Another characteristic she appreciated was the flexibility and freedom of the curriculum, which encouraged students to explore all kinds of possibilities.

Kids love to listen to stories, and the teachers won’t limit how they draw…I feel that teachers’ educational philosophy impacts their teaching approaches and students’ artworks…the teachers tell a story first, and then the students start creating art. In my son’s class, the teachers’ approach is that they use the story and then connect the story to the art project. The teachers are very supportive and encourage kids to explore their drawing style. (JL, in-person interview, July 11, 2019)

The parents and students’ siblings were allowed to be in the classroom. JL mentioned that sometimes her younger son stayed in the room while his older sister was in the class. Even though her son did not participate in the class, he learned some concepts by sitting in the room and observing the class activities.

The classroom is spacious, and parents are welcome to stay and observe their children and the class. Some parents are big fans of the program, and they even take notes in the class…Sometimes my son and I sat in the room while my daughter was in the class. I noticed that my son paid attention to some weird details. For example, one time, the teacher played a K-pop music video, and he said: the background is like what the teacher said, many repeated images with different colors. I didn’t know what he was talking about until later my daughter explained that he was mentioning the teachers introduced Andy Warhol in one lesson. (JL, in-person interview, July 11, 2019)

JL further described that because the class consisted of both returning and new students, the returning students knew the structure and the rules of the class and were able to help new students get used to the routine. JL also noticed that not only the children but also many parents were very engaged in the class.

Normally, one primary art teacher and 1-2 assistant teachers will be there. Also, there are many returning students in the class, and they know the routine very well. Every time the teachers ask or say something, they respond right away. I think it is great to have both returning students and new students in one class because the new students can quickly learn from the returning students by observing them… Some parents are big fans of the
program, and they even take notes in the class. (JL, in-person interview, July 11, 2019)

JL also mentioned that the out-of-school art program cooperated with the local community and school to do a mural project at an elementary school. Every student painted their own design and made the completed work diverse and vivid. JL was impressed by the curriculum design because she thought the project was a rare opportunity. Moreover, the art curriculum incorporated local and indigenous cultures, which was another characteristic that was appealing to her because those concepts were essential to children’s learning experiences.

There was a pretty awesome art project. They cooperated with a local elementary school to create a mural. Every kid had their own design and style, and they were so proud of their work. My kids even told each of their friends about the mural. I think that was a unique opportunity because it was group work, and they have learned how to work together to make the art cohesive. Another excellent project is about local customs and indigenous culture. They integrated those contents into the art class. I think it is very important, even though some of the concepts might be too hard for young kids, having the experience can help them gradually understand the concepts. (JL, in-person interview, July 11, 2019)

IC mentioned that although minimum assistance from parents was allowed when children were doing art, the teacher asked parents to verbally guide and encourage their children rather than directly do the work for their children. IC further described that the teacher believed children made art for themselves and their development, so the teachers did not want parents to submit their children’s work to art competitions. IC was impressed by the teachers’ principle regarding this; they do not want children’s interest in art to be undermined by unwanted competition.

Parents can stay in the room or come later to pick up their children. The teachers have some requests for parents, and they would communicate with parents before the kids start the program. They don’t want parents to submit their children’s artworks to art competitions. Also, parents can sit with their children if they need assistance, but the teachers ask parents to avoid directly drawing for their kids. If students need help with ideas, the teachers will give suggestions, but they usually won’t directly draw on students’ work for them. As far as I know, many art programs help kids make artworks
for art competition purposes, so they tend to adjust students’ work to make it look better directly. So, this art program is not that kind of direction. (IC, in-person interview, July 12, 2019)

IC also mentioned that storytelling was a vital part of the art curriculum. She noticed that the children and their parents enjoyed and had more confidence in trying different art mediums. This class climate encouraged her daughter to explore more art mediums.

There is a lot of storytelling and watching videos. The teacher tells a story related to the art lesson, and then the students create art according to the story. I notice that the children in the class seem confident in all kinds of art mediums. After taking the class for several months, my daughter seems to be more willing to try different art mediums and knows how to use them. (IC, in-person interview, July 12, 2019)

SH mentioned that the teachers introduced the artists and used the mediums or techniques artists used to create art. She also shared a graffiti art project she thought was interesting. Aside from learning about the art styles and artists, the children also role-played the artists, which made learning like playing.

The teachers introduced artists and their artworks, and then they use a similar approach to create art. For example, one lesson was about Jackson Pollock, and the kids used his drip technique of pouring or splashing paints to create art. Another excellent lesson was about graffiti art. They used giant canvas as a wall and painted some things on it. The teacher pretended to be a police officer, and all the kids were graffiti artists. When the police whistled, the kids had to hide and wait until the police was gone. It was such a fun class! (SH, in-person interview, July 15, 2019)

YW liked the way the teachers stimulated the children’s imagination by encouraging them and providing all kinds of supplies. She noticed the teachers’ approaches positively influenced her children’s art production so they could come up with many great ideas when doodling.

The teachers’ approaches are like, um, letting kids explore all kinds of styles and ideas. He [YW’s son] has been in the program since he was three years old. I would say his artworks don’t look very exquisite and pretty, but he is able to draw whatever he thinks of. Even though his doodles might not be professional or beautiful, every piece has a story…they use all kinds of art mediums, and students’ imagination is encouraged. This is
why I want him to learn art. (YW, in-person interview, July 16, 2019)

YW also praised the teacher’s nontraditional classroom management approaches. She noticed the teacher’s strategy was essential to her children’s attentive engagement in the art lesson. The teacher made art creation like a magical journey, which was appealing to young children. YW also liked the concept of upcycling the teacher applied in the art curriculum. She noticed that her children’s art learning experiences had internalized into their daily lives, such as they often used recycled materials to make artwork at home.

As soon as the class starts, the teachers become just like them [children]. For example, the teachers will turn the light off and say: “Bibbidi Bobbidi Boo!” like they are using a magic wand to turn the light on [laugh]. Yeah, because they [children] are all very young, they genuinely believe the teachers have magic power [laugh]. Yeah, the teachers really thought through the details. Also, every week they have different themes and projects with varying mediums of art…Also, the teachers would turn a concept into a motto. For example, several weeks ago, they were doing a project using recycled materials. The teachers would say: “Clever kids, turning trash into gems!” So, after that class, they would dig into the recycle pile and make something at home. Like one time, they made a boat, and they also used boxes made a hideout with mysterious symbols on the door [laugh]. (YW, in-person interview, July 16, 2019)

The participants described four characteristics of the art program, including encouraging parental presence, incorporating multiple instruction methods, encouraging students to explore various mediums and visual representations, and incorporating community resources and collaborating with local schools. Those characteristics appealed to the participants because they considered them to be complementary to their educational philosophies.

Descriptions of Children’s Art Productions

The participants described their children’s art production by focusing on children’s reactions to and creation processes rather than the quality of the production. First, many participants said their children loved to show their works to them and verbally shared the details
of the work and the class. Also, the participants tended to encourage their children to talk more about the artwork because they believed this was positive reinforcement. In addition, the participants noticed their children’s desire to do art was enhanced after attending the art classes. The children tended to create works spontaneously with the art techniques they learned from the art program. Moreover, the children applied the knowledge and the art techniques to their school artwork, which showed they internalized their art learning experiences. Some participants further noted their children preferred flexible and diverse learning content.

MY noticed that the art classes influenced her children’s art production and their motivation for doing art. For example, they spontaneously asked MY for clay to make objects after learning how to use clay in the out-of-school art class. They also talked about some tips the teachers mentioned in class. MY also noticed that her children became more observant about colors, and they tried to duplicate the class project at home.

I also noticed that the day after they made the clay sculpture in class, they asked me to take out Play-Doh because they wanted to make something. I think it might be because they just learned about using clay, so they want to play with it. They made ice cream, and I think they applied what they had learned from the class to their work. Yeah, they would say: “The teacher said that you are going to roll it out first, and then fold it into half,” something like that. I also noticed that they learned about colors because they would say: “Mom, do you know what color you will get if you mix yellow and red?” I think they found it interesting, so they repeatedly asked me those questions they had just learned, and they wanted to practice them at home. (MY, in-person interview, July 9, 2019)

IC’s daughter loved to share the details of the projects she made. IC explained that she had to be very careful responding to her daughter because children might expect certain answers or praise from their parents. IC tried to give her daughter constructive positive reinforcement instead of simple praise. Specifically, IC asked her daughter what she liked the most about her artwork.

Every time I picked her up, she would say: “Guess what I made today?” She is very
proud of her works and willing to share all the details, such as what happened in the class or what the teachers said in the class. She remembers many details, and she would talk about the art creation process and the supplies she used… We have to prepare a proper and safe space for them to explore and develop… so they will feel that they can complete a task on their own. I also discuss the environment set up with my daughter, like what is this for? Is it safe to put this here? Try putting the stuff that she needs at the place she can reach. By doing so, kids can actually develop pretty well. Another thing I think is also very important is that parents should avoid making any judgments about their artworks. I know it is hard for many parents because kids might keep asking what you think of their works. But we have to use different approaches, such as giving more positive and constructive feedback and encouragement. Or, I tend to turn the question back to her and ask her: what do you think of your work? Which part of your work do you like the most? (IC, in-person interview, July 12, 2019)

Like IC’s daughter, ZY’s son loved to share what he made in the out-of-school art program. He thoughtfully introduced the details of the making process and materials and showed great confidence in his art creations.

My son is always excited when he brings his work home. He would show me his work right away and introduce what he has done in the class. I would ask him to tell me more about his work, like, what materials he used, and he would start talking. He is confident about his artwork. (ZY, in-person interview, July 16, 2019)

Both SH and YW noticed that their children applied what they had learned from the out-of-school art program to the art projects they did at home or in school. For example, SH’s daughters did a 3D art project in the program, and they then used boxes to make objects at home. YW described that her children also used the art techniques they learned from the art program in their school artwork.

They did a lot of 3D art projects so I would save some boxes for them. They made a lot of weird stuff at home, such as airplanes and others. Some of their creations I can’t even tell what they were [laugh]. (SH, in-person interview, July 15, 2019)

They also have regular art classes in school. Toward the end of each semester, they would bring all their artworks home. I noticed that they applied what they had learned from the out-of-school art class to their school artwork. I thought that was great because it shows that they have learned it. (YW, in-person interview, July 16, 2019)
ML noticed that her son was more interested in the class activities, such as storytelling, than art creation. She further mentioned that her son loved to doodle robots and preferred a more interactive classroom dynamic and imaginative art creation topics. Additionally, when his parents were doing the art with him, he tended to be more engaged in the art creation process.

He [ML’s son] loves stories and jokes, so he would be very engaged when the teachers were telling stories or jokes. But when he starts doing art or learning knowledge or concepts about art, he tends to space out and seems not interested in it. Sometimes he would need his dad to sit with him and be a cheerleader to him or help him. Yeah, he needs company to complete the art project…he used to be in another art program. I chose that one because kids can stay there a bit longer, so I would have more time to do other things. But after a couple of semesters, I felt that the art teacher’s teaching approach and specialty didn’t fit my son’s needs. So, it was rough for both teacher and my kids because my son wanted to draw whatever he liked, and he didn’t like teachers telling him what to do. Yeah, so we switched to the current art program. (ML, in-person interview, July 14, 2019)

SH described the art program had an exhibition twice a year. The students decided what they wanted to display and discussed it with the teachers. Her daughters made 3D sculptures, which required the teachers’ assistance because her daughters were too young to complete the project independently. SH mentioned that she understood the teachers had to ensure the students’ work could be displayed, so the teachers’ intervention might be necessary to some extent. However, she preferred to have the children complete their artwork as much as possible by themselves.

I’m thinking of looking for art programs that offer more advanced drawing skills because I feel they [SH’s children] are old enough to move on to the next stage…the current art program is great, too. They made a lot of 3D artworks, and there would be an exhibition every semester. Before the exhibition, the children would decide what they wanted to create for the show. They started the project by drafting the idea and then discussed it with the teachers. Even though they might have come across many challenges, the result was still looking good. Because they were too young and the project was for the exhibition, the teacher tended to help a lot, unlike the weekly art project. I felt that they [SH’s children] could do more, and the teachers could do less for them. But I understand that the teachers have pressure on their shoulders due to the timeframe. They have to get everything done on time. (SH, in-person interview, July 15, 2019)
The participants were aware that creating artwork with high formal quality seemed unrealistic given the age of their children. They tended to focus on their children’s learning process because they understood that their children’s artwork might not be perfect. However, encouraging their children to pursue advanced art technical skills was still an option for some participants because they believed their children would have better control of fine motor skills and develop a better artistic sense when they got older.

Summary

This chapter discussed the parent-participants’ contexts and experiences when placing their children in the Children’s Art Camp and the Magic Power of Art Program, Taipei. The parents’ contexts referred to their exosystem and mesosystem, focusing on their social systems, art-related experiences, and peer groups. The participants’ exosystem included five facets: perspectives of the community, influences of educational attainment, descriptions of social networks, perspectives of the educational system, and the influences of work experiences. According to the participants, one of the biggest advantages of living in the Taipei metropolitan area was having plenty of access to educational resources. Because of the high quality and quantity of out-of-school programs in the city, the participants were able to select programs that worked best for their children. Many participants had educational and child development-related degrees, and their narratives indicated that their educational backgrounds significantly shaped their educational philosophy and parenting approaches. In addition to the influences of their educational attainment, the participants’ social networks subtly but profoundly influenced the information they received. Also, social media acted as a hub for the participants’ social networks because it was the primary platform for finding information and connecting the participants with
their social networks. As far as the participants’ perspectives of the educational system, children’s academic performance was the dominant discourse in the current educational system. Thus, art was not the top choice for many parents because this discourse still widely influenced parents’ selection of out-of-school programs. Furthermore, the participants’ work experiences seemed to significantly affect their parenting approaches because workplaces, specialties, and colleagues played roles in their social networks.

Additionally, the parents’ descriptions of their mesosystem consisted of their previous art experiences and peer groups, which directly shaped their perception of learning art and influenced their educational decision-making processes. According to the participants’ narratives of their art learning experiences, parents’ support determined children’s art learning opportunities inside and outside of school. Many mentioned that they fully supported their children’s exploration of art because they did not receive much support from their parents in their childhood. For the participants who had positive art learning experiences, they tended to be more observant in their children’s art learning and teachers’ instruction. Moreover, the participants agreed that their peer groups shared similar parenting and education perspectives, and they received much helpful information and support from their peer groups.

The participants’ microsystem included the parent-child dynamic at home and the parent-child-teacher dynamic in the out-of-school programs. For the parent-child dynamic at home, the participants stressed three critical approaches: carefully observing children’s needs, giving proper positive reinforcement, and attentively communicating with children. For the parent-child-teacher dynamic in the out-of-school programs, the participants noticed that the interpersonal dynamic directly influenced children’s willingness to attend the class, such as peer scaffolding, teachers’ sense of humor and caring, and the parental presence or parents’
assistance.

The parent-participants’ reflective thoughts were an in-depth reflection of being parents and out-of-school art program-related experiences, including their educational philosophy, perspectives of art, purposes for placing their children in the art programs, description of the art program, and description of their children’s art production. The participants’ educational philosophy highlighted four foci: children’s mental wellness, learning attitudes and interpersonal relationship development, physical wellness, and parental approach. Additionally, the participants perceived art as an essential part of individuals’ life experiences. They suggested that art helps individuals’ expression and supports emotional well-being.

Three considerations were emphasized for selecting out-of-school art programs: their work and family schedules, children’s interests, and enhancement of children’s development and learning. Furthermore, the participants described four characteristics of the art program that appealed to them: encouragement of parental presence, incorporation of multiple instruction methods, encouragement of exploring various mediums and visual representations, and incorporation of community resources and collaboration with local schools. For their children’s art production, the participants focused on their children’s reactions and the creation processes. Specifically, they noticed that their children preferred flexible and diverse learning content. Also, their children loved to show off their artwork and verbally share all the details. The children’s desire to do art was enhanced after attending the art classes.
CHAPTER 6
DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The parent-participants’ exosystem, mesosystem, and microsystem interconnected with each other and profoundly shaped their reflective thoughts. This study analyzed the intertwined relationships and delved into the contextual factors that influenced the US and the Taiwanese parent-participants’ reflective thought. According to the findings, community structures, resources accessibility, and district atmosphere were significant components of the parent-participants’ exosystem. Those components profoundly and inadvertently shaped their social and cultural capital. Additionally, the parent-participants’ art-related experiences and the influences of peer groups constituted their mesosystem, which further enhanced or sculpted their social and cultural capital as well as their perspectives toward art learning. Moreover, parent-child interaction and in-class dynamics were the direct microsystems that demonstrated the practices of the parent-participants’ parenting approaches. Furthermore, the parent-participants’ educational philosophy, perspectives toward art, descriptions of the art programs, and descriptions of children’s art production constituted their reflective thought, which was the impetus for their parenting approaches and the purposes for selecting out-of-school learning for their children.

Exosystem: Community Structures, Resources Accessibility and District Atmosphere, and Individuals’ Social/Cultural Capitals

In this study, community structures, resource accessibility and district atmosphere, and
individuals’ social/culture capital were the primary dimensions that constituted the parent-participants’ exosystem (see Figure 3). Community structures, such as an urban city or a rural town, set the tone for the accessibility of educational resources and the learning atmosphere. Moreover, resource accessibility and district atmosphere gradually formed the parents’ cultural and social capital, such as their educational background and social networks. Furthermore, the parent-participants’ social and cultural capital determined their interpretation of educational concepts and the implementation of their parenting. The district atmosphere, such as to what extent the schools value children’s learning, can inadvertently but profoundly shape parents’ investment in children’s education. In other words, the parent-participants’ educational perspectives and parenting approaches influenced their resource allocation. Because resource accessibility and district atmosphere were intertwined, when the atmosphere showed that certain educational resources were valued more than others, the supply of those educational resources was likely to be higher and more likely to be utilized by families.

Figure 3: Relationship among community structures, resources accessibility, district atmosphere, and the parent-participants’ social/cultural capitals.
Lantern and Strip Light: Community Structures Shaped the Out-of-School Art Programs’ Characteristics

As an essential part of the exosystem, the community structure played a contextual factor that unspectacularly but widely influenced the parents’ decision-making regarding out-of-school selection. One of most direct influences was accessibility of art learning. As a rural college town, DeKalb provided the primary supply of educational resources to fill the families’ basic demands. Yet, this status also implied there were not many alternative options for out-of-school program selection. To the parents who did not expect various or advanced learning options, out-of-school learning opportunities for children in DeKalb might seem sufficient and accessible. On the other hand, what DeKalb can offer regarding out-of-school programs might be insufficient for parents looking for diverse and advanced learning options.

Another inextricable factor for the participants’ exosystem was the nature of being a college town. To DeKalb as a college town, NIU is a major entity. Because most parent-participants had a connection with the university, such as being alumni or current employees, they tended to have more positive views toward NIU’s role in the community. They tended to have a higher confidence level in NIU and its outreach programs, especially having those programs as potentially the only option for a specific subject learning opportunity in town.

Thus, Art Express, as the only out-of-school art program in DeKalb, had an advantage and privilege in terms of recruiting students because it did not have competitors and the university supported its resources, including teachers, supplies, and space. To some extent, those unique conditions within this exosystem resulted in a single lantern effect. Specifically, Art Express was the only figure (art program) on the stage (community) and received all audiences’ attention without extra advertising or promotion (see Figure 4).
On the contrary, the Taipei metropolitan area was a different exosystem, and the sense of accessibility of art learning was different as well. Because there was a high density of out-of-school art programs in Taipei, the quality and quantity of the programs did not seem to be factors that influenced the accessibility of art learning. Instead whether the programs could be reached by the public transportation within an acceptable time determined their accessibility, since for most of the parents, the city’s public transportation was the primary commuting approach.

Moreover, being a metropolitan area, Taipei did not strongly associate with the atmosphere of a university town, even though there were 33 colleges and universities in Taipei at the time of this study. Also, the participants did not express a strong attachment to or connection with those universities, nor to the universities’ outreach programs. Because the out-of-school program market in Taipei was competitive, applying various advertising approaches and establishing a solid customer group seemed to be an essential part of program operation. Compared to Art Express, out-of-school art programs in Taipei were more like individual light
bulbs on a strip holiday light (see Figure 4). Individual art programs might need to compete with others, but every program also contributes to a vibrant and accessible out-of-school art learning environment.

**Resource Accessibility and District Atmosphere Influenced Parents’ Resource Allocation**

As part of the community structure, resource accessibility and the district’s atmosphere also directly influenced family resource allocation. Specifically, resource accessibility indicated the educational resources in the community that were more affordable and approachable. Parents were more likely to take advantage of one educational resource than another because of their accessibility. The district’s atmosphere referred to the overall parents’ and schools’ tendency of subject prioritization for children’s learning. Because this atmosphere tended to be invisible, only the parents who lived in the community and interacted with other parents or school personnel can capture such insiders’ cues.

The characteristics of the districts influenced children’s out-of-school learning opportunities and parents’ attitudes toward out-of-school program selection. The DeKalb school district and other local schools featured many outdoor activities, such as soccer and swimming. Those activities became the most accessible and affordable options and were many parents’ first choice when choosing out-of-school programs. However, this circumstance can also be an invisible frame that influenced parents’ decision-making, especially when most parent-friends mentioned placing their children in soccer classes.

Because there were various out-of-school programs available in Taipei, the parents encountered different challenges from those the parents in DeKalb had. According to the Taiwanese parent-participants, most of the pre-schools provided afterschool art class options,
and parents tended to take advantage of this opportunity because doing so extended the time for picking up their children and matched many parents’ work hours. Also, because children had afterschool art classes, many parents could have thought placing their children in another out-of-school art program was unnecessary. This situation could have influenced parents’ decision-making because the universality of after-school art programs might result in parents seeing art as a secondary option when selecting out-of-school programs.

According to the Taiwanese parent-participants, English learning and STEM-related programs seemed to be parents’ primary choices. Moreover, physical development-related and sports-related programs were the top choice for parents with younger children. Additionally, some Taiwanese parent-participants expressed that many school districts in Taipei were highly competitive, which resulted in many parents wanting their children to have a jump start before they entered elementary schools by learning English in the preschool. Second language acquisition was a dominant discourse among many parents in Taipei, and English was the most popular option because it was also a required subject in the school system in Taiwan. On the other hand, although the US parent-participants did not particularly highlight second language acquisition, one participant talked about the importance of having children learn Spanish. She also expressed that there was no second language learning program available in DeKalb. Given the increasing number of Hispanic and Latinx populations, she thought this should be emphasized more in both schools and the district.

As far as why physical development-related programs became the top choice for many parents, many parent-participants explained that it might be because child development theories that focused on physical development were emphasized and enhanced by traditional media, parenting books, and social media. Those types of programs became more and more popular and
thus became more accessible in the community. Moreover, because many parents placed their children in physical development-related and sports-related programs, peer pressure became a factor in that many parent-participants felt selecting this type of program was a requirement instead of an elective option. Although the US parent-participants and Taiwanese parent-participants were in very different community contexts, the situation regarding the selection and accessibility of physical activity-related programs somehow resonated.

For art education researchers and educators, reexamining the above factors or phenomena that constitute a community’s exosystem is essential. Art education acts as an agent that connects visual spectacles to human experiences, and educators should be dynamic and reflect on external societal changes theoretically and practically. Parents’ viewpoints of early childhood education not only influence young children’s early learning experiences, but their impact may also last until elementary school and middle school stages. Reexamining how the exosystem shaped parents’ way of thinking might be an appropriate starting point for analyzing out-of-school art programs’ advantages and disadvantages when competing or collaborating with other subject fields.

**Parent-Participants’ Cultural and Social Capital Shaped Parenting Perspectives**

Individuals’ cultural capital is acquired over time; influences individuals’ habitus, such as their way of thinking; and makes individuals become more receptive to similar cultural influences (Bourdieu, 1984). The parent-participants’ educational background was a significant factor that constituted their cultural capital, which was further enhanced by their work experiences. Additionally, individual’s social capital refers to the individuals’ social networks in a particular society where they have a shared sense of identity, norms, and values (Bourdieu,
Specifically, these networks included the groups the parent-participants interacted with and got information from, including virtual/in-person friends. Also, the internet, social media, traditional media, and books were other agents that influenced their social capital.

**Parent-Participants’ Educational Background and their Cultural Capital**

The parent-participants’ cultural capital regarding art education, family, and child development tended to be more apparent in their narratives. For example, the parents with educational and developmental backgrounds tended to work in educational facilities. Also, their co-workers were likely to be from a similar background. The accumulation of knowledge in their field significantly shaped their criteria for out-of-school program selection and the way they described their rationales for their parenting approaches (see Figure 5).

![Diagram](image.png)

**Figure 5:** Participants’ educational background and their work experiences influenced their cultural capital.
The parents’ educational background was an essential element that constituted their social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Some of the parent-participants had education- and development-related backgrounds at both research sites. The parents with these backgrounds tended to have more in-depth perspectives regarding curriculum structures, lesson concepts, and teacher-student interactions, and they also worked in education-related fields. Those parents’ descriptions of their children’s learning and development were clearly connected with their educational background and working experiences. They tended to use related knowledge, concepts, or cases to describe events in their life. The parents who did not have education- or development-related backgrounds tended to use their childhood and K-12 learning experiences to explain concepts. In other words, although those parents might not be able to use educational jargon to describe their parenting perspectives, they tended to reexamine both positive and negative learning experiences and provided some specific examples to articulate their thoughts.

The parents’ educational and work experiences were essential elements for constructing their cultural capital (see Figure 5), but those elements were not the only sources. For the parent-participants who specialized in non-education fields, they constructed their point of view by connecting their previous learning, working, and social network experiences with their parenting experiences. In other words, their social capital might play a more significant role in terms of forming their perspectives of parenting.

**Parent-Participants’ Social Networks and their Social Capital**

The parents’ social capital involves their social networks and peer groups. In this study, I distinguished between the parents’ social networks and their peer groups. Parents’ social networks are part of their exosystem and refer to a broader scope of networking, including
groups the parents interact with and get information from, such as the internet, social media, traditional media, books, and virtual/in-person friends. Additionally, as part of the mesosystem, the parents’ peer groups indicate their direct, close, and core friend groups, including friends from work, family, and other intimate social networks (see Figure 6). The parents’ social networks are discussed in the following section, and their peer groups are discussed in the Mesosystem: Art-related experiences and peer groups section.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 6: Relationships among the participants’ exosystem, mesosystem, and their social capital.**

For the parent-participants from DeKalb, their social networks were across local organizations, workplaces, churches, homeschool groups, and social media groups, whereas the participants from the second research site, Taipei, shared that their social networks included workplaces, peer groups from school, parent groups from children’s school, and social media groups. According to most of the parents from both sites, regardless of which social group played the most influential role in their lives, social media was the primary platform for
receiving information. In other words, because technology became a primary communication tool, the participants received information about out-of-school programs or activities from their social networks through social media on their phones or computers. For example, one parent found program information online and shared it with other parents from their workplace. Especially for the Taiwanese parent-participants, their in-person interpersonal connections had been significantly replaced by virtual interactions.

Aside from being a communication tool, social media itself contains a good deal of information and many virtual social groups. Many parents from both research sites stated they relied on different parents’ social media groups for parenting-, program-, and activity-related information, even though they might not know the other parent-members in-person in those social media groups. In other words, technology and social media changed the traditional way of social networking and, to some extent, blurred the physical limitations of different social groups. For example, one Taiwanese parent-participant knew other participants from their master’s program and her workplace, and her child and another participant’s child happened to be in the same class in school. They knew each other from a social media group and later realized they had some common friends on social media who happened to be friends from the master’s program. Simply put, although those parent-participants might have different social networks in the real world, they also inadvertently connected to each other on social media. Also, some participants joining the same social media groups might indicate they were interested in the same things or had similar values. Thus, the information flow on social media might be a more influential factor that constitutes a group of people’s identities, norms, and values, further creating a sense of collective ideology.
In this study, the parent-participants’ mesosystem focused on their art-related experiences and peer groups. The parent-participants’ art-related experiences constructed their perspectives of what kind of art learning experiences they want to provide for their children. Additionally, their peer groups influenced their education perspectives through frequent interaction and information exchange.

**Parent-Participants’ Art-related Experiences**

The following section discusses the parent-participants’ art-related experiences, including the factors that constituted their positive and negative art learning experiences (see Figure 7). Additionally, both the US and the Taiwanese parent-participants mentioned their passion and motivation for doing art and the time they spent on artistic pursuits declined after elementary school, but they still saw art as an essential part of human beings and child development. In other words, their aspiration and passion for art seemed to hibernate for periods of time, but they might eventually find an outlet elsewhere or turn their aspirations into supporting their children’s artistic inclinations.
Factors that Constituted Participants’ Positive Art Learning Experiences

Having great art teachers who encouraged the parent-participants to do art was one of the primary reasons for their positive art learning experiences. According to the participants from both sites, the characteristics of a good art teacher included being supportive, encouraging exploration, tailoring teaching strategies to fit different students’ needs, and providing various art mediums. Being supportive was the essential characteristic the participants mentioned first when describing good art teachers in their K-12 classrooms. Because not every parent-participant had positive art learning experiences at every stage, those experiences could have caused a lack of confidence or even a reluctance to do art. Embracing every student, regardless of different art
skills or motivation to do art, was a significant first impression to the parent-participants. Building on being supportive, art teachers encouraging students to explore all kinds of topics, art mediums, styles, and ideas was a critical step for forming the parent-participants’ interest in doing art. Following encouraging exploration, recognizing students’ different needs and applying different approaches to help individual students overcome challenges and frustrations were key to further strengthening the parent-participants’ motivation to do art. Moreover, the art teachers structuring their art class so the parent-participants got to try different art mediums was another characteristic that made the art learning process exciting.

Another positive art learning experience was about the accomplishment of doing art. Many parent-participants from both research sites shared memories about winning prizes in art competitions. To them, this experience was a great positive reinforcement because it made them feel that their competency or talent for art was recognized. Furthermore, some participants described that having a special memory of a particular art project was another important component of a positive art learning experience. Those artworks had unique meanings to them and reminded them of a specific event, self-exploration, or interpersonal relationship.

Although the US parent-participants and the Taiwanese participants had different learning experiences and contexts, they shared similar perspectives about the factors that influenced positive art learning experiences. Compared to the parent-participants’ descriptions of prior good art teachers’ characteristics, there was not much difference in the criteria they believed an effective art teacher should have in the current day. Those characteristics are still applicable to today’s K-12 art classroom.
Factors that Constituted Participants’ Negative Art Learning Experiences

According to the parent-participants’ descriptions, three main factors resulted in their negative art learning experiences. The first was about the dynamic between the teacher and the students. The participants’ negative memories were often attached to a specific accident, such as the teachers saying or doing something perhaps unintentionally that hurt the participants’ feelings or their confidence in doing art. Another factor was about the art lessons. The parent-participants described that some art classes were monotonous because the art teachers structured the art lesson in a traditional way, such as still life drawing. According to the participants, students of that age were likely drawn to more diverse and exciting lesson topics. If the art class could not motivate them, they could quickly lose interest and turn to other activities or subjects, and this might result in a view that they had an inadequate ability for art creation.

Both the US parent-participants and the Taiwanese parent-participants shared their experiences of missing or being forced to give up art classes. Some mentioned that the schools or districts did not value art and often art classes were cut or used as math or language classes. Although the parent-participants were interested in art, they did not receive proper and sufficient art education in school.

Another situation mentioned only by the Taiwanese participants was that their parents did not support their interest in art, either in-school or out-of-school. All the Taiwanese parent-participants who had such experiences addressed the influence of the GSAT and the ideology of prioritizing academic performance. In other words, because art was not included in standardized tests for applying for schools, it tended to be marginalized by schools and ignored by their parents. If the parents did not value art as an important part of their children’s learning, they
were less likely to support their children to do art either in- and out-of-school. Some parent-participants shared their frustration about this circumstance because even though they showed great interest in doing art, their parents did not value their aspirations. Some of their parents even inhibited their art learning opportunities.

Negative teacher-student dynamic, monotonous content, and missing art classes were three factors that connected to the parent-participants’ negative art learning experiences. Many parent-participants had both positive and negative art learning experiences. As one of the components that constituted individuals’ cultural capital, individuals’ in-school art learning experiences may influence individuals’ viewpoints of school art education but not necessarily determine their perspective of art education in general. Furthermore, the parent-participants’ reexamination of those negative art learning experiences became the fuel that motivated the parent-participant to value art education more and further support their children’s art learning. Therefore, delving into how the parent-participants reflected on their art learning experiences helped understand how those experiences shaped their perspective of art.

Decline and Revival of Attention to Art

Both the US and the Taiwanese parent-participants mentioned that their passion and motivation for doing art and the time they spent on it declined after elementary school. The reasons were different from individual to individual. For the Taiwanese parent-participants, the pressure of pursuing good academic performance in subjects like math, languages, or science forced them to give up on doing art when they entered middle school. They expressed that this result was not something they could choose because getting into a top-tier high school was the dominant discourse both in school and in their family. Some Taiwanese parent-participants
mentioned that middle school age children were at a stage at which they could get lost easily. They were metaphorically standing at an intersection of exploring their identities, interests, aspirations, and future and pursuing academic performance. The school and parents’ interventions could dominantly direct their path. As some Taiwanese parent-participants shared, their parents knew they were inclined to art but did not provide any support or encourage them to pursue art. Gradually, they turned to the route their parents wanted them to take and were far away from options such as pursuing art.

The US parent-participants did not particularly mention the pressure from the standardized tests like the SAT as a cause for paying less and less attention to art. However, they shared a similar situation in that they were facing more options in middle school, such as peer groups, school clubs, activities, and schoolwork. Those factors could be in the way of continuing to pursue art. In addition, some schools might not offer regular art classes, which could exacerbate this circumstance. Moreover, when children start developing a sense of self and a competitive nature, they are likely to get frustrated and might feel inadequate compared to their peers’ performance in art creation.

The status of the decline of attention to art seemed to continue to their adulthood (see Figure 8). However, the parent-participants also mentioned that although they might have passed the point of pursuing art, they still saw art as an essential part of human beings and child development. In other words, their aspiration and passion for art had gone into hibernation but not disappeared. Although both the US and Taiwanese parent-participants said they might not engage in art as often as when they were young, their aspiration and passion for art were still hibernating in their mind. Thus, they might find an outlet elsewhere, such as through their house decor, or turn their aspirations to supporting their children’s artistic inclinations.
Parent-Participants’ Peer Groups

The parents’ peer groups included the parent-participants’ direct, close, and core friend groups, which included the participants’ friends from work and school, family members, and acquaintances from other social networks. As a significant agent that influenced individuals’ social capital, the parent-participants’ peer groups directly and frequently interacted with them and immediately influenced their education perspectives. Because the parent-participants’ peer groups also played an essential role in supporting each other and exchanging information, they might gradually develop a shared sense of ideology, norms, and values.

Parent-Participants’ Core Peer Groups: Families and Close Friends

The US parent-participants emphasized their peer groups’ role in exchanging information and supporting them in many ways. The first type of participants’ peer group came from their families. Those peer groups provided direct support, such as financial support and childcare support. Their support also included financially supporting the parent-participants’ children to
participate in different out-of-school programs and activities. Another type of peer group consisted of their close friends. They seemed to have a solid tie in that they and their families hang out frequently, and their children went to the same out-of-school programs. For the parent-participants who might not live close to their close or extended families, they were more likely to build a strong interpersonal connection with their peer groups. Because they shared similar parenting perspectives, they tended to do the same activities together, and some even formed a home-schooling group. Placing their children in the same out-of-school art programs provided another opportunity for them to get together.

The Taiwanese parent-participants had similar types of peer groups. For the participants who lived close to their families, grandparents might share part of the parenting job. The participants’ core friends were still the primary peer groups to them. Many Taiwanese parents shared that they would get together and become close friends because they shared similar parenting perspectives and values. Additionally, they frequently shared information about parenting, programming, and activities. This mutual influence gradually shaped their social capital. Aside from in-person interaction, they also highly relied on social media to communicate with each other. One of the reasons was that the sources of parenting-, programs-, or activities-related information mostly came from the Internet and social media. Using social media to share or spread the information was timelier and more effective than the face-to-face communication or physical mail used in the past.

Peer Support Came with Peer Pressure

Having supportive peer groups also came with peer pressure. According to the Taiwanese parent-participants, although their peer groups provided helpful information, receiving and
responding to their peer groups can be stressful. One of the reasons was the competitive nature among parents. Some parent-participants agreed that their peer groups shared similar parenting approaches in that they wanted their children to explore various programs and activities instead of emphasizing school performance. However, because many of them lived in highly competitive school districts, they were more or less influenced by the competitive atmosphere. Also, when interacting on social media or in person, talking about their children’s school performance and the out-of-school programs they were attending was unavoidable. Seeing the variety of programs that their peer groups chose for children could make them feel they had fallen behind because they did not place their children in such programs. Moreover, because using social media as their primary communication tool with friends allowed them to share and receive immediate responses and a great amount of information from their peer groups, the instant digital connection might exacerbate peer pressure among their peer groups and increase their information anxiety.

The parent-participants’ social networks and peer groups can sometimes overlap and intertwine due to social media usage. Because the parent-participants and their peer groups tended to join like-minded social media groups, the information exchanged and discussion can solidify their shared identities and collective ideology and further form their social capital. Therefore, social media usage seemed to be a vital factor that needs consideration when investigating how parents constitute their social and cultural capitals.

**Microsystem: Parent-Child Interaction and In-Class Dynamics**

In this study, the parent-participants’ microsystem encompassed the parent-child interactions and in-class dynamic. According to both the US and the Taiwanese parent-participants’ narratives, being present, empathetic, transparent, and patient are the characteristics
parents should have when interacting with their children. Additionally, parental engagement and class climate influenced the class dynamic and children’s art learning experiences. In other words, although the art lessons and the art projects were the primary components of children’s out-of-school art learning experiences, the dynamic among peers and teachers was also an inseparable factor that constituted their learning experiences.

Parent-Child Interaction: Being Present, Empathetic, Transparent, and Patient

Both the US and the Taiwanese parent-participants emphasized the importance of parents’ presence. Being present was the foundation for developing a positive parent-child interaction. For many US parent-participants, the parent-child interaction did not necessarily mean parents and their children had to do something together; sometimes parents simply needed to be present for significant emotional support to their children. This could include parents and children reading together or children doing homework at the kitchen counter while parents make dinner. The Taiwanese parent-participants also agreed that parents’ presence was significant, but most of them saw being present more like parents and children doing something together with a clear purpose, such as going to museums, visiting parks, or having family trips. Many parent-participants from both research sites shared that their children love their parents’ company regardless of what they were doing. In other words, from the participants’ perspectives, parents’ presence was such a significant emotional support that it helped develop a sense of intimacy and security.

Additionally, both the US and the Taiwanese parent-participants believed that carefully listening to children and observing their needs helped parents make suitable plans to respond to a child and adjust their parenting approaches. In other words, especially for young children who
might not be able to express their needs clearly, being a parent who can empathize with their children’s needs and positions was another vital characteristic that contributed to a positive parent-child interaction. Moreover, several parent-participants stressed that proper positive reinforcement helps develop children’s confidence. This is especially evident when children completed a project or artwork because they immediately wanted to show their work to their parents, and the parent-participants would verbally praise their children. The parent-participants’ approaches involved asking their children to share their ideas about and the content of the artwork and how they made it to reinforce the learning experiences. Simply put, the more they participated in art creation and speaking practice, the more confident the children would become.

Both the US and the Taiwanese parent-participants agreed that attentively communicating with children significantly aided in developing a positive parent-child dynamic because the children could feel respected and heard. Some US parent-participants stressed the importance of being transparent with their children – specifically, treating children as individuals who can think critically and are capable of having conversations regarding social issues, historical and contemporary events, and their decision-making about their lives instead of avoiding sensitive or challenging topics. In addition, some Taiwanese parent-participants addressed the importance of being transparent and patiently communicating with their children about the purposes of household decisions. In other words, when parents make decisions for their children, these parents feel it is vital to communicate the decision-making process and the factors that might be involved in this process.

According to the parent-participants’ narratives regarding their parent-child interactions at home, being present, empathetic, transparent, and patient were the four characteristics that contributed to positive interactions with their children. The actual practice the US and the
Taiwanese parent-participants applied to their parent-child interactions might be different. For example, the US participants might include social issues in conversations with their children, but the Taiwanese participants did not report having similar conversations during the interview.

In-Class Interaction: Parental Engagement and Class Climate Influence the Class Dynamic

The dynamic among parents, children, and teachers was primarily influenced by the class structure. Art Express (US) and the Magic Power of Art Program (Taiwan) invited parents to sit in during class time. On the contrary, the Children’s Art Camp (Taiwan) did not allow parents or guardians to stay in the room. Therefore, parent-teacher and parent-child interactions tended to have a minimum influence on the art class dynamic in the Children’s Art Camp.

Also, children’s age determined the degree of parental involvement. Especially in the younger children’s classes, the parents tended to be more involved in the creating process than in the older children’s classes. In the older children’s classes, parents tended to stay and observe the class instead of being directly involved in the creating process. Moreover, parents’ motivation was another factor that influenced parental engagement in art classes. Some parents preferred to drop off their children and leave for other business; others had great interest in the art lesson and chose to stay to help their children or simply observe the class.

Among the US and the Taiwanese parent-participants who stayed in the class, some considered themselves observers and avoided interrupting or influencing the teaching. They were interested in the teaching process and wanted to be present to support their children emotionally. Others preferred to be involved, such as having some hands-on activities with their children instead of passively watching the class. Many of the parent-participants reported that regardless of the degree of their involvement, their children seemed to like to see their parents stay in the
class with them because they could show their in-progress work to their parents and receive immediate responses. Both the US and the Taiwanese parent-participants expressed positive viewpoints about the art teachers and how they interacted with the children. The US parent-participants highlighted the teachers’ qualities, such as being warm, friendly, and patient with students. The Taiwanese parent-participants stressed that the teachers were humorous and playful.

Children’s learning was profoundly influenced by the class climate, which was shaped by the art teachers’ teaching styles as well as the children’s characteristics. According to the parent-participants, when encountering playful art teachers, the class tended to have more group activities and their children tended to be more active, especially for the younger children’s classes. As far as the older children’s class, the lessons tended to be more structured, and the children focused more on individual art creation. Moreover, the parent-participants mentioned the combination of returning and the new students could also shape the classroom climate. The returning students tended to be familiar with the classroom environment and the class rules. To some extent, they could calm the new students down and guide them to get used to the new environment because the new students observed and learned from the returning students’ behaviors as well as how they interacted with each other and the teachers. Furthermore, some parent-participants mentioned that peer interaction might be an even more critical factor influencing children’s willingness to go to the art class. For example, if children’s friends were also in the class, it could be a strong reason that motivated them to go to the class. In contrast, they might show reluctance because they did not have friend or they disliked someone in the class.

Additionally, both the US and the Taiwanese parent-participants addressed that one of the
vital roles the parents played in the classroom dynamic was persistently encouraging their children, especially for the children who attended the class for the very first time. Although the art lessons and the art projects were the primary components of children’s out-of-school art learning experiences, the class dynamic was also an inextricable factor in their learning experiences. Parental engagement and class climate significantly influenced the class dynamic in different aspects. Moreover, parental engagement may also connect to parent-child interactions at home. Therefore, considering interpersonal dynamics at home and in the art programs can help paint a fuller overall picture of children’s art learning experiences in an out-of-school art program.

Parent-Participants’ Reflective Thought

In this study, the parent-participants’ reflective thought encompassed their educational philosophy, perspectives toward art, descriptions of the art programs, and description of children’s art productions. These four domains are interconnected. Each domain and its connection with the others were explained in the following sections.

Parent-Participants’ Educational Philosophy

The US parent-participants’ educational philosophy for parenting encompassed three dimensions, including capability, well-being, and empathy. The Taiwanese parent-participants’ educational philosophy for parenting encompassed capacity, well-being, and physical wellness (See Table 6). The first dimension, capability and capacity, was related to the children’s ability be grounded and get through life, such as problem-solving skills, proper learning attitudes, and interpersonal relationship development. The second dimension, well-being, particularly
emphasized their children’s emotional development and mental health, such as self-expression and finding a spark in life. Moreover, the US parent-participants highlighted the development of empathy, whereas the Taiwanese’s parent-participants emphasized the importance of children’s physical health.

Table 6
US and Taiwanese Parent-Participants’ Educational Philosophy Components

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Capability</td>
<td>Capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging exploration</td>
<td>Proper learning attitudes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing critical thinking skills</td>
<td>Interpersonal relationship development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-being</td>
<td>Well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-expression</td>
<td>Finding “spark” in life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>Physical wellness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being kind</td>
<td>Maintaining physical health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being virtuous</td>
<td>Consuming healthy foods</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

US Parent-Participants: Capability, Well-Being, and Empathy

The US parent-participants’ educational philosophy for parenting also encompassed three dimensions: capability, well-being, and empathy. The first dimension, capability, was related to children’s ability to make their lives grounded and get them through life. The US parent-participants’ description about why they want their children to be equipped with such capability came from their personal experiences and reflection on their parents’ parenting approaches. They stressed that encouraging their children to explore different things was vital because their experiences trying things out and making mistakes allowed them to gain problem-solving skills and be creative and brave. Additionally, aside from supporting their children to explore various
opportunities, they emphasized that being transparent and treating children as individuals who can think critically and independently was important. In other words, instead of seeing children as naive and innocent individuals who might not understand the complexities of reality, some parent-participants stated that parents were responsible for showing them how the world operates and what challenges individuals or societies might face or are facing.

The second dimension, well-being, particularly emphasized their children’s emotional development and mental health. Many US parent-participants contended that self-expression helped their children’s well-being. They also mentioned that having children do art helped them express their feeling and thoughts in a non-verbal way. Especially when encountering difficulties and obstacles, individuals can use artistic creation to reexamine complex emotions and mend their metaphorical wounds.

The third dimension, empathy, focused on how a child treats others and how they interact with people. Several US parent-participants expressed that they wanted their children to be good and kind individuals. They also noted that empathy was an important quality for making an individual a virtuous human who can make the world better.

Taiwanese Parent-Participants: Capacity, Well-Being, and Physical Wellness

The Taiwanese parent-participants’ educational philosophy for parenting encompassed three dimensions: capacity, well-being, and physical wellness. The Taiwanese parent-participants stated that cultivating proper learning attitudes and interpersonal relationship development was essential to get their lives going. They felt being persistent and not giving up quickly would help their children become responsible learners. Additionally, they believed that learning and doing art can cultivate children’s persistence and responsibility. Moreover, several Taiwanese parents
stressed the importance of having good manners and knowing how to treat people with respect because this quality helps individuals develop interpersonal relationships. They also contended that interacting with peers and teachers in art class was an excellent way to learn socialization.

The second dimension, well-being, was also emphasized by Taiwanese parent-participants. Instead of focusing on self-expression, the Taiwanese parents saw that maintaining individuals’ well-being was to find their spark in their lives. They mentioned children will encounter many rough patches and obstacles as they grow up and they might need to face those challenges alone. Their spark would help them get through obstacles.

The third dimension, physical wellness, was only emphasized by the Taiwanese parent-participants. All the Taiwanese parent-participants stressed the importance of physical health. Specifically, they wanted their children to exercise regularly and consume healthy foods; therefore, they tended to place their children in a sport-related out-of-school program or had workout time blocked out on their daily schedule.

The findings indicated that the US and Taiwanese participants valued similar educational philosophies but had different manifestations and emphases. In other words, the US parents tended to emphasize children’s external-oriented behavioral functions, such as children’s capability, whereas the Taiwanese parents tended to focus more on children’s internal-oriented behavioral functions, such as their capacity. For instance, both the US and Taiwanese parents stressed the importance of interpersonal relationships. The US parents saw being kind to others as a manifestation of interpersonal relationship development. The Taiwanese parents emphasized being courteous and respecting others, the foundation of developing interpersonal relationships. Additionally, the US and Taiwanese parents emphasized children’s well-being, such as mental health and emotional development, but the expression of that emphasis between cultures varied.
The US parents viewed art creation as a mechanism of self-expression that can improve children’s mental health. Taiwanese parents viewed art creation as a way to help children find their spark, which refers to the enthusiasm to live for the sake of living, that can give children emotional and spiritual support when facing hardships. Although both US and Taiwanese parents might have different approaches and emphases, they both held some of the same basic values.

**Parent-Participants’ Perspectives Toward Art**

The US and Taiwanese parent-participants’ perspectives of art encompassed five aspects: empowering self, developing valuable character traits, supporting emotional well-being, enhancing open-mindedness, and daily experiences (See Table 7). Additionally, the parent-participants’ perspectives of art fell into three categories: the essence of art, the function of art, and art as experience. The function of art also resonated with the parent-participants’ educational philosophy, including capability/capacity, well-being, and empathy. Each aspect and its related categories are explained in the following section.

Table 7

Components of US and Taiwanese Parent-Participants’ Perspectives Toward Art (Integrated)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Empowering self</th>
<th>The essence of art</th>
<th>Children have an inner drive to create art</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Art has intrinsic value for individuals (e.g., self-empowerment and a sense of ownership)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing valuable character traits</td>
<td>The functions of art</td>
<td>Perseverance, observation, courage, and creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Capability/Capacity</td>
<td>Development of problem-solving skills, visual literacy, and a sense of aesthetics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Well-being</td>
<td>Elevating people’s spiritual and cognitive demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting emotional</td>
<td></td>
<td>Appreciating the beauty and the richness of everyday life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued on following page)
Both the US and Taiwanese parent-participants mentioned that exploration is part of children’s nature, and children are naturally attracted by art creation. According to the parents’ observations, their children seemed to have an inner drive to create art. This viewpoint resonates with Dissanayake’s (1974) argument that art is a natural part of human biology. Moreover, some US parent-participants elaborated on the essence of art, saying that art has intrinsic value for individuals, such as connecting to self-empowerment and creating a sense of ownership. Specifically, young children might not have much control over their lives while they are experiencing the development of their sense of self and others and physical development. They primarily rely on caregivers’ assistance to complete what they want to do or desire to accomplish. Thus, creating and doodling things might be some of the few behaviors that can fulfill young children’s essential need for self-accomplishment.

The functions of art aligned with the parent-participants’ educational philosophies focused on children’s capability/capacity, well-being, and development of empathy/physical wellness. The parent-participants saw art as a tool to help develop valuable character traits, such as perseverance, observation, courage, creativity, visual literacy, a sense of aesthetics, and problem-solving skills. In other words, art creation was a means to cultivate such traits to ground their lives and get them through tough times. Furthermore, some parent-participants addressed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>well-being</th>
<th>Enriching individuals’ minds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Broadening one’s viewpoints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sparking joy in life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expressing feelings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enhancing open-mindedness</th>
<th>Empathy/Physical wellness</th>
<th>Being open-minded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Appreciating and embracing cultural differences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daily experiences</th>
<th>Art as experience</th>
<th>Art is an essential part of individuals’ life experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
that art can elevate people’s spiritual and cognitive demands. Namely, they believed that seeking spiritual and cognitive growth was inherently part of the human drive, and art can be an approach to fulfill such needs. Moreover, the parent-participants believed art could improve well-being, especially children’s emotional development. Specifically, art helps individuals appreciate the beauty and the richness of everyday life, enriches individuals’ minds, broadens one’s viewpoints, and sparks joy in life. Also, the parent-participants mentioned that art can help individuals express feelings and heal emotional wounds. Especially for young children, art creation serves as a non-verbal communication approach that allows them to express their feelings and ideas. Furthermore, the parent-participants believed that art helps people be open-minded and appreciate and embrace cultural differences. Some participants also mentioned that art is an essential part of individuals’ life experiences and is grounded in day-to-day lives. This idea was similar to Dewey’s (2005) art as experience. In other words, the participants valued art as an inseparable part of daily experiences.

In sum, the parent-participants saw art as the essence of humankind and an inseparable part of daily experiences. Also, they believed that art serves to empower self, develop valuable character traits, enhance open-mindedness, and support emotional well-being. They further stressed that young children should spend more time on art, and schools and communities should provide more art learning opportunities.

Parent-Participants’ Intentions and Purposes of Selecting Out-of-School Art Program

The US and the Taiwanese parent-participants had both similar and different purposes for placing their children in out-of-school art programs (see Table 8). Providing outlets for their children to cultivate their interests in art and art skills was a common ground purpose. This
purpose related to the parent-participants’ perspectives of art regarding developing valuable character traits and supporting emotional well-being. Additionally, seeing the Saturday school as free babysitting was only addressed by the US parent-participants. Moreover, the Taiwanese parent-participants specifically pointed out that one of their purposes of placing their children in out-of-school art programs was to enhance children’s development and supplement art learning in school.

Table 8

US and Taiwanese Parent-Participants’ Intentions and Purposes for Selecting Out-of-School Art Programs

| Parent-participants’ Intentions and Purposes of Selecting Out-of-School Art Programs |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| **US parent-participants**      | Providing outlets for their children to learn art in professional and structured art classes |
|                                 | Free babysitting                                                               |
| **Taiwanese parent-participants** | Cultivating children’s interests in art                                         |
|                                 | Providing a better art learning environment for their children                 |
|                                 | Enhancing children’s development and supplementing art learning in school      |

For the US parent-participants, there were two main reasons for placing their children in out-of-school art programs, including providing outlets for their children to learn art in professional and structured art classes as well as free babysitting for their children. Most parent-participants mentioned their children showed enthusiasm for doing art, which motivated them to seek art learning opportunities for their children. Also, because the parents might not have professional art creation and instruction skills, they sought out-of-school art learning programs in which their children could structurally learn. Some US parent-participants mentioned that the Saturday School art program appealed to many parents because it is free for NIU employees and
students and provides quality art learning for children. Many parents took advantage of it and put their children in the class because they needed time to focus on getting some business completed without being distracted by their children.

For the Taiwanese parent-participants, their children’s interest in art was the primary factor that motivated the participants to search for out-of-school programs, which is similar to the US parents’ perspectives. The participants believed art learning required professional instruction. Also, it seemed that the Taiwanese parent-participants did not consider their children’s in-school art learning to be sufficient. Thus, placing their children in an out-of-school art program was the best way to provide a better art learning environment for their children. Additionally, the parent-participants stressed the importance of enhancing their children’s development and learning in general. Specifically, some participants considered doing art as a means to help children’s fine motor skill development. Others believed that out-of-school programs could offer broader and more in-depth learning that supplemented regular school learning.

Parent-Participants’ Descriptions of the Out-of-School Art Programs

The US parent-participants held positive perspectives about the art curriculum, instruction, and environment in the Saturday School art program. They described six main features of Art Express: creating a welcoming environment, encouraging expression and innovative ideas, providing interdisciplinary art curricula, incorporating children’s artistic and cognitive development, emphasizing the learning process, and connecting/communicating with parents. Additionally, the Taiwanese parent-participants described four characteristics of the art program, including encouraging parental presence, incorporating multiple instruction methods,
encouraging students to explore various mediums and visual representations, and incorporating
community resources and collaborating with local schools. The Taiwanese parent-participants
also expressed that those characteristics appealed to the participants because they matched the
parents’ educational philosophy. Both the US and the Taiwanese parent-participants’ primary
descriptions of the out-of-school art programs are listed in Table 9.

Table 9
US and Taiwanese Parent-Participants’ Descriptions of the Out-of-School Art Programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent-participants’ Descriptions of the Out-of-School Art Programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>US parent-participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcoming environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging exploration and expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complexity of the art curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age-appropriate curriculum design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwanese parent-participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging parental presence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporating multiple instruction methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging exploration of various mediums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporating community resources and community collaboration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Art Program in the Eyes of the US Parent-Participants

The US parent-participants identified six main features of Art Express. The feature they
mentioned the most frequently was its welcoming environment. They expressed how the teachers
patiently interacted with the children and carefully listened to them, which made the parents feel
warm and welcomed. The second feature was the art teachers encouraging the children to
express their feelings and ideas. Many parent-participants had very positive feelings about
encouraging expression. Especially for young children who were still developing their language
usage, using non-verbal approaches helped them express their feelings and ideas. The parent-participants also mentioned they were impressed by the complexity of the art curriculum, which incorporated different learning concepts or subjects into art creation and made the art curriculum interdisciplinary. For example, some participants addressed that the art teachers incorporated visual literacy into the art lessons and encouraged young children to think outside of the box about the meaning of a picture. Additionally, some parent-participants mentioned they were impressed by the age-appropriate curriculum design in that the art lessons were tailored to children’s artistic and cognitive development. They also highlighted that the teachers and art curricula encouraged exploration and problem-solving skills.

Furthermore, the parent-participants suggested that Art Express should try multiple advertising strategies to promote the art program and reach out to more families from the community. Also, communicating with parents about the curricula’s purposes and educational features of the art program through multiple approaches, such as take-home notes or handouts, could help parents better understand the importance of curriculum themes and art learning in general. Overall, the parent-participants held positive perspectives about the art curriculum, instruction, and environment in the Art Express Saturday School program.

Art Program in the Eyes of the Taiwanese Parent-Participants

According to the Taiwanese parent-participants’ descriptions, the out-of-school art program had four primary characteristics: encouraging parental presence, incorporating multiple instruction methods, encouraging students to explore various mediums, and incorporating community resources and collaborating with local schools. The art program encouraged parents to sit in the classroom and watch the classes because it strengthened parental involvement and
supported their children emotionally. Additionally, the parent-participants mentioned that the teachers incorporated multiple instruction methods, such as storytelling, role-play, and modeling, which created a positive learning environment. Moreover, the teachers applied many interdisciplinary themes to cultivate students’ creativity and encouraged students to explore various mediums and visual representations. Many parent-participants emphasized the importance of trying different art mediums and topics because those experiences encouraged exploration.

For the Taiwanese parent-participants, their work and family schedules were vital considerations when selecting out-of-school programs for their children, especially for the parents with full-time jobs who had limited time for taking their children to the class and picking them up. Additionally, children might attend several out-of-school programs during a week, and the parents had to figure out the most convenient class schedule that matched the family’s schedule. Unlike the Taiwanese parent-participants, the US parent-participants did not particularly stress scheduling issues. Perhaps this could be explained by Art Express having a regular schedule that is announced a semester beforehand, so the parents can adjust their schedules accordingly.

Parent-Participants’ Descriptions of Children’s Art Productions

The US and the Taiwanese parent-participants mainly focused on their children’s reactions to the art production and how they responded to the art classes. Their primary descriptions of children’s art productions are listed in Table 10. According to the US parent-participants, their children seemed to be inclined to work on a different art project every art class because they liked to have a completed artwork to bring
home and show their parents and receive immediate feedback. Especially for young children, having something that can be brought home and shown to their parents seems more important than the completion or quality of the artwork. Many parent-participants mentioned their children showed preferences toward certain art projects and themes. Those themes might relate to the activities or subjects they liked in their day-to-day lives. Also, the children tended to show stronger passion toward the art projects when the teachers applied various art mediums and activities. On the contrary, the children were more likely to get bored with repetitive procedures and art mediums. Moreover, many parent-participants addressed that having a final art show seemed a great incentive to children. Having their artworks displayed and families gathered around to celebrate the children’s accomplishments can be a memorable experience for the children.

Table 10

US and Taiwanese Parent-Participants’ Descriptions of Children’s Art Productions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent-participants’ Descriptions of Children’s Art Productions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>US parent-participants</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like to show artworks to parents to receive immediate feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have preferences toward art projects related to daily lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have preferences toward using various art mediums</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like to have one’s artworks be shown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Taiwanese parent-participants</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like to show artworks to parents to receive immediate feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are enticed by various activities and storytelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply the knowledge and the art techniques to school’s artworks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Taiwanese parent-participants highlighted their children’s reactions to art creation and the follow-up influences of their out-of-school art learning experiences. Many participants
stated their children loved to show their work to them and to verbally share the details of the work and the class. Moreover, the participants tended to encourage their children to talk more about the artwork because they believed this was positive reinforcement. The parent-participants also noticed that their children were more enticed by various activities and storytelling in art classes rather than only doing art creation. Additionally, the participants mentioned their children’s desire and ability to do art were enhanced after attending out-of-school art classes. For example, the children would apply the knowledge and the art techniques to their school artwork, which showed they internalized their art learning experiences. The parent-participants shared that the formal quality of artwork was not their primary concern for their children’s learning outcomes because they were aware their children were still young. However, the parent-participants’ expectation of their children’s development of art skills gradually increased when their children entered elementary school. In other words, encouraging their children to pursue advanced technical art skills was still an option for some participants because they believed their children would have better control of fine motor skills and develop a better artistic sense when they got older.

Recommendations for Future Research

**Exploration of more international comparisons regarding the influences of parents' experiences and educational philosophy on their children's art learning experiences**

The findings showed that the US parents tended to emphasize children's external-oriented behavioral functions, whereas the Taiwanese parents tended to focus more on children's internal-oriented behavioral functions. The parent-participants' educational philosophy influenced the way they perceive art learning. For instance, both the US and Taiwanese parents emphasized
children's mental health and emotional development, but the expression of that emphasis between cultures varied. The US parents tended to encourage their children to externally express feelings through art, whereas the Taiwanese parents emphasized the development of an internal spark through art. Additional research comparing similar and different cultures, such as other East-Asian, European, and South American countries, could provide a more in-depth analysis that better supports my current arguments. Moreover, future research could also include participants from different communities within the US and Taiwan, such as first or second-generation Asian immigrants in the US as well as new immigrants in Taiwan. Aside from strengthening the arguments, additional cultural comparison investigations would allow me to explore hidden or potential cultural factors (such as the factors of the macrosystem and chronosystem) that contribute to the differences and similarities, such as historical and current geopolitical circumstances, domestic political climate, social media influences, religions, and major social events, like wars. For instance, the US parents stressed external expression through art as a vehicle for balanced mental health might be influenced by Judeo-Christian theology, whereas the Taiwanese parents emphasized the concept of an internal "spark," which might root in Buddhism.

Additionally, the findings indicated that both US and Taiwanese parents have a great degree of empathy and reflexivity, and they emphasized mental health as an essential part of child development. They adjusted their mindset and parenting approaches according to the interaction between themselves and their children. This process is somehow like a course of therapy. When parents described their children's art experiences and their parent-child dynamic, they often referred to their childhood and life experiences. However, little research has discussed how parents' life experiences influence their parenting emphasis on children's mental health and
their perspective on improving mental health through art. Investigation of how mental health has become a priority of parenting focuses and how this perspective is formed by social change and significant social events might be able to unfold an underexplored domain in the field of art education. Furthermore, such topics and factors relate to the macrosystem and chronosystem, which have a broader and deeper influence on individuals' social-ecological systems, and can extend and strengthen the scopes of the research.

Investigating international comparisons that focus on how major social events have short-term and long-term influences on parents' educational philosophy and their perspectives on arts could also open a significant dialogue in art education. For example, the Russo-Ukrainian War, as a significant social event, has profoundly changed many Ukrainian and Russian families. This war has been embedded into those people's macrosystem and chronosystem and will deeply influence many generations in all aspects, including parents' educational philosophies and their perspectives on the purposes of arts. Given such traumatizing experiences, some topics need further exploration: 1) what are Ukrainian and Russian parents' perspectives on mental health, and how do their perspectives influence their parenting approaches, 2) what are visual imageries and visual art's roles to the parents and the children during the war and the post-war era, and 3) what are the similarities and differences between Ukrainian and Russian parents' perspectives of parenting and art learning due to the war? Additional research on international comparisons that focus on specific cultural attributes or social events would provide a broader scope of analysis of art education in cross-cultural settings. Most importantly, the investigations of cross-cultural influences can shed light on the underestimated domains in art education and further contribute to the depth and width of art education as a whole.
Conducting Quantitative Research with a Larger Group of Parent-Participants

This research utilized a qualitative method to delve into the parent-participants’ perspectives of children’s out-of-school art learning. According to the finding, the components of the parent-participants’ educational philosophy, including capability, capacity, well-being, empathy, physical wellness, and the five components of parent-participants perspectives of the value of art can be individual variables for future and larger scale quantitative research. Although this research provided an in-depth analysis of individual parent-participants’ reflective thoughts and experiences placing their children in out-of-school art programs, future quantitative studies might be needed to investigate the breadth of this subject matter. Furthermore, such qualitative research can be extended to a larger parent population or applied to different regions to compare different communities in the same cultural context.

Additionally, the parent-participants’ descriptions of the out-of-school art programs and their children’s art production can be a foundation for developing strategic plans or program assessments to enhance the current program structure, curriculum topics, and learning environment. This can also be expanded into small scale surveys that can be conducted periodically to monitor the growth of a program. Large-scale quantitative research and small-scale program assessments allow art educators and researchers to investigate out-of-school art learning from multiple angles to enhance community engagement and maintain or increase out-of-school learning quality.

Investigation of the Dynamic between Children’s In-School and Out-of-School Art Learning Experiences

The dynamic between children’s in-school and out-of-school art learning experiences,
including collaboration, competition, and complementing of each other, can be a potential research topic that opens a conversation about in-school and out-of-school art classes’ position in community engagement. Some parent-participants mentioned their observations of their children’s in-school art learning and how their views became factors that motivated them to support their children’s out-of-school art learning. For example, the lack of art classes and various art mediums in school was a significant concern for some parent-participants. They believed that art learning while children were young was essential to children’s development. Therefore, they reached out to out-of-school art programs to ameliorate insufficient art learning. Also, other parent-participants addressed how their children’s out-of-school art learning experiences enhanced their in-school art learning.

Investigations of the relationship between in-school and out-of-school art learning might help art educators and researchers detect hidden issues regarding school art classes and art curricula. Also, art educators and researchers can better understand the dynamic ecological system of art learning opportunities in communities and better situate the role of out-of-school art programs to serve the actual needs of the communities. Moreover, children’s in-school and out-of-school art learning opportunities intertwine and constitute their holistic art experiences and artistic development. Therefore, investigating both in-school and out-of-school art learning experiences might be valuable to form a statement about contemporary children’s artistic development.

Follow-Up Research Regarding the Parent-Participants’ Perspectives of their Children’s Art Learning in Later Grades

The findings indicate there is a disjoint in the parent-participants’ passion and motivation for doing art. Although they addressed different internal and external factors that caused this lack
of connection, they expressed their concerns and solutions for not letting it happen to their children. To investigate whether the parent-participants’ actions can genuinely and effectively influence their children’s art experiences moving on to middle school and high school, the researcher can conduct a longitudinal study to see the aftereffect of the parents’ strategies. Additionally, observing whether the parent-participants modify their perspectives according to the changes of external factors, such as their children becoming adolescents or the pressure from preparing for standardized tests, might be insightful for exploring the role of parental influence on young adults’ future career selections.

This research was not able to cover the influences of macrosystem and chronosystem due to the limitation of the research scale because both systems require a long period of time to observe the participants’ changes. Conducting longitudinal research will allow researchers to analyze the scope and the sequence of influences the macrosystem and chronosystem might have in constructing the participants’ cultural capital and whether the influences can be passed to the next generation.

Conclusion

This research analyzed some critical factors that influenced parents’ perspectives toward children’s out-of-school art learning experiences. Also, this research revealed the hidden issue of information asymmetry between art teachers’ standpoint and parents’ standpoint. In other words, parents’ expectations of art education did not always align with some current critical conversations in the field of art education. Parents’ previous art experiences, cultural capital, and peer influences were dominant factors that profoundly shaped their perspectives toward art, which further influenced their children’s art experiences. Parents are vital stakeholders in
education, and art educators must develop an effective communication channel with parents to ensure better in-school and out-of-school art learning environments. Also, having sustainable support from parents allows art education to continuously grow and thrive in the K-12 school system and communities.

One of the strategies to improve the communication between the field of art education and parents is to find shared perspectives to start a dialogue. The analysis of the parent-participants’ reflective thoughts, such as educational philosophy and perspectives toward art, provided a scope of what parents care about and value the most. Art educators can develop a constructive dialogue with parents based on those perspectives and gradually introduce contemporary themes in art education to parents and gain support from them. Suppose art teachers have great support from parents. In that case, they are more likely to justify the importance of art to schools, districts, policymakers, and other stakeholders; further improve art teachers’ teaching environments; and provide a better place for children to explore art.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORMS FOR INTERVIEW AND OBSERVATION
CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION
IN THE STUDY OF PARENT-ORIENTED PERSPECTIVES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD
ART EDUCATION (INTERVIEW)

I understand that I will be participating in a cross-cultural research study conducted by Meng-Jung Yang. Meng-Jung Yang is a doctoral student at Northern Illinois University. The research sites of this research are Art Express, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois, USA, and Children’s Art Winter Camp, National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei, Taiwan.

The purpose of this study is to explore the contexts and experiences of parents in Taiwan and the United States when they place their children in an after-school art program. My participation in this study will take place in the Fall of 2018 to the Spring of 2019. During this study I will participate in three interviews, and each interview will last approximately an hour. I will also be asked to show my child/ren’s artworks from the art program, which may be photographed as part of the project.

I will be using a pseudonym of my choosing for the interview. Information obtained during this study may be published in academic journals or presented at academic conferences, but any information that could identify me will be kept strictly confidential. My responses and my child/ren’s artwork will be kept on a password-locked computer.

Participation in this study is voluntary. My decision of whether to participate will not negatively affect me or my child/ren. I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty or prejudice.

Any questions about this study should be addressed to Meng-Jung Yang at [contact information] or yangmengjung@gmail.com

I agree to participate in this study and acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form.

__________________________________________________________________________
Signature of Participant Date
CONSENT FOR AUDIO/PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORDING

The interviews will be audio-taped and photographs may be taken of my child/ren’s artwork (if relevant) by the researcher to document the events of the study. This audio/photographic material will be accessible only to the researcher. The researcher will destroy these materials three years after the completion of this study as mandated by the Office of Research Compliance at Northern Illinois University.

I agree to allow myself to be audio-taped and photographs may be taken of my child/ren’s artwork as part of this research study, and I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form.

__________________________________________
Signature of Participant                        Date
CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION
IN THE STUDY OF PARENT-ORIENTED PERSPECTIVES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD
ART EDUCATION (OBSERVATION)

I understand that my son/daughter will participate in a cross-cultural research study conducted by Meng-Jung Yang. Meng-Jung Yang is a doctoral student at Northern Illinois University. The research sites of this research are Art Express, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois, USA. and Children’s Art Winter Camp, National Taiwan Normal University, Taipei, Taiwan.

The purpose of this study is to explore the contexts and experiences of parents in Taiwan and the United States when they place their children in an after-school art program. My son’s/daughter’s participation in this study will take place during their group meeting times in the September to October 2018 (Art Express) and January to February 2019 (Children’s Art Winter Camp). During this study, s/he will be observed during the class.

My daughter/son will be using a pseudonym of their choosing for the observation. Information obtained during this study may be published in academic journals or presented at academic conferences, but any information that could identify my son/daughter will be kept strictly confidential. Her/his responses and artwork will be kept on a password-locked computer.

Participation in this study is voluntary. My decision of whether to allow my son/daughter to participate will not negatively affect them. Participants are free to withdraw at any time without penalty or prejudice.

Any questions about this study should be addressed to Meng-Jung Yang at yangmengjung@gmail.com

I agree that my daughter/son may participate in this study and acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form.

Signature of Participant       Date
CONSENT FOR AUDIO/PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORDING

The observations will be audio-taped and photographs may be taken of my daughter’s/son’s artwork (if relevant) by the researcher to document the events of the study. This audio/photographic material will be accessible only to the researcher. The researcher will destroy these materials three years after the completion of this study as mandated by the Office of Research Compliance at Northern Illinois University.

I agree to allow my son/daughter to be audio-taped and photographs may be taken of her/his artwork as part of this research study, and I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form.

________________________________________________________________________

Signature of Participant                     Date
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDES
Interview guides
Interview questions: General

1. Tell me about your educational experiences.
2. Tell me about your previous art learning experiences.
3. Tell me about your child/ren’s previous art learning experiences.
4. Tell me about the family you grew up with.
5. What did your parents do with you during leisure times when you were little?
6. Tell me about your current family.
7. What do you do with your child/ren during leisure times?
8. Why did you decide to place your child/ren in an after-school art program?
9. What do you expect them to learn and experience from the program?

Interview questions: In-depth

1. What was your favorite thing about the program?
2. Is there one moment/event from the program that stands out?
3. Tell me about your child/ren going to the first class of the program of this semester.
4. Tell me about what you normally do when you drop off/pick up your child/ren.
5. What do you care about the most in terms of placing your child/ren in this program?
6. Please describe what happened on the last day (the art show) of the class.
7. What have been some fun things that have happened? Any challenges?
8. How do you know if your child/ren enjoyed or didn’t enjoy the class?
9. How do you respond to your child/ren?
10. Tell me about your child/ren’s artworks from the art program.
11. What conversation do you and your child/ren have about the art class?
12. What do you think of the influence of the art experience on your child/ren?
13. What could have been change/improved about the program?
14. What have you learned from the experience(s) of placing your child/ren in an after-school art program?
15. Since the program ended, what do you think of the influence of the art experience on your child/ren?
16. You mentioned in the previous interview that you and some parents are tied to NIU. Can you tell me more about how this relationship influences you, as you are a working-mom/dad with young child/ren? (optional)
17. Compared with other kinds of activities you arranged for your child/ren, what meaning does Art Express/ Children’s Art Winter Camp have for you and your child/ren?
18. Compared with what you thought of art in your childhood, what do you think of early childhood art now?
19. If the Community School of the Arts/NTNU Art department is going to offer a new art program, what do you want the content and schedule of the program to be?
20. What have you learned from the experience(s) of placing your child/ren in an after-school art program?