Working and Collaborating with Children:

Exploring Partnerships between Art Educators and Children to Support their Voices and Perspectives in Art Education

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Abstract

This thesis explores a practical collaboration between a researcher, a cultural institution, and a group of child participants within the field of art education. The paper describes a case study project in which the methods and topics were child-led, and which allowed children to express their points of view. The voices and data produced by a group of six child participants were collected through the use of semi-structured interviews and photography. The focus was on the process of making and creating artistic and nature-inspired projects; through this process, the children explored embodied learning by using various arts-based and nature-based materials. The research emphasized themes of play, agency, and relationships to further children's autonomy, creativity, imagination, and artistic growth. A practical and in-depth guide and explanation stressed the ethical procedures that were followed to ensure the protection of the children's rights and well-being during the research. By combining practical methods and emerging theories inspired by art education, childhood studies, participatory action research, arts-based and place-based fields of studies, along with various pedagogies inspired by John Dewey and Elliot Eisner, the research demonstrated that respectful collaboration alongside listening and learning environments is possible while working with children. Children are willing to lead, share, and express their voices, experiences, and worldviews while carrying out fun and engaging art-making activities. The children in the study, surprisingly, showed a genuine interest in the project by asking intriguing questions about the process of research and the nature of a thesis research project.

Keywords: *Child-led, agency, imagination, practical methods, childhood, ethical considerations, artistic explorations*

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Contents

Introduction

Looking back on my K–8 educational experiences in a small rural school, it was the artistic, ecologically themed, and place-based activities that remain powerfully ingrained in my memory. I recall caring for a bean plant in a small white Styrofoam cup with my name on a piece of green tape. Every day was a surprise for me and for my classmates as we patiently waited to see whose plant died or thrived under our individual care. There was a lot of disappointment because many of the plants did not survive, but each child accepted their bean plant's fate. We cheered on the classmates who grew successful beanstalks that would almost touch the tiled roof ceiling. We then talked among ourselves and investigated the successful and unsuccessful actions of care towards the bean plants in order to think of better ways to care for our plants in the future. I also remember in kindergarten taking part in an artistic garden project, where I planted flowers with the help of the teacher and decorated a picnic table at the school's memorial garden using finger paints. Over the next few years, during recess with my friends, I would walk around the garden looking for the new plant growth every spring. The handprint on the picnic table acted as a visual record of my body's growth, and over the years I revisited this handprint to see how much I had grown. During these moments as a young child and artist, I began reflecting on the connections between human experiences and nature. Rather than learning about the growth of a plant and the growth of the human body in textbooks or on a screen, I was actively exploring these concepts in meaningful discussions with other children. As a child, I was beginning to explore my identity and an emerging social awareness in a specific place.

When I look back and revaluate these activities from an art educational perspective, I begin to wonder in what ways I was learning about the world around myself from the perspective of a young child. Why is it that I remembered the experiential and the embodied learning

projects, such as placing my hands in wet, gushy paint to help complete an artistic project in the garden? I wonder: How can children define deep and personalized learning? How can the process of art-making help create more meaningful learning experiences? What does it look like when educational institutions listen to and amplify authentic child voices and experiences? How can children be encouraged to speak for themselves?

Concept Statement

There are current theoretical debates, such as in the field of sociology, about who chooses to define children, concepts around childhood studies, and children's roles within society, education, and as rights holders. Current research suggests that there is a lack of practical methodologies and approaches for working directly with children and their insights (Chan, 2011; James & Prout, 2015) as well as a lack of child engagement and reflection in research processes (Chan, 2011, p. 109; Hansen, 2017, p. 2). Most notably, some researchers emphasize the role of art-making and art education methods to help dismantle barriers inherent in adult–child relationships and listen to children's authentic voices (Blaisdell et al., 2019, p. 17; Hansen, 2017, p. 4). The goal is to find arts-based and place-based methods to help document children's ideas about their learning. Their perspectives, thoughts, and opinions should be valued within academia and should be considered worthy of further exploration and examination (Hansen, 2017, p. 10; Ritchhart & Church, 2020, p. 27).

Audience

The purpose of this paper is to inspire artists, educators, educational policy makers, researchers, and caretakers of young children who are interested in a diverse range of theoretical discussions surrounding learning and education in childhood studies with an arts-based and place-based lens. A detailed case study is provided to highlight the various practical aspects and

ethical considerations while working with children in educational spaces. For those who are interested from an educational and community perspective, such as art graduate students, artists, teachers, environmental educators, and community programmers, the case study may be used as a helpful guide to what is generally required, or to practical aspects that can be considered while working with children in a supportive and respectful manner. Researchers, educators, and educational policy makers in the fields of sociology and psychology, such as social workers, psychologists, childhood sociologists, therapists, curriculum designers, principals, and ethics committee members, may consider the topics surrounding childhood studies and exploring different pedagogical approaches with arts-based child development theories when creating future curricula and when requesting funding for arts programming. Furthering the discussion of power hierarchies in relationships between children and adults can create a greater focus on children's preferred communication methods; this will help educators to expand topics and address the urgency of children's social and emotional well-being. Caretakers of children, such as parents and family members, may be considering different schools in comparison to national standardized schools, and may be in search of informative research about how arts can be beneficial for children's learning, development, and preparedness to grow into self-aware and creative citizens.

Research Question

In what ways can children aged 9–12 years and adults collaborate to create a nature-based art project in community spaces to support the amplification of children's voices, learning ideas, and knowledge exchange?

A few questions considered during the creation of this research project addressed each topic of the research question: children's voices, learning ideas, and knowledge exchange.

Children's Voices

Defining children's voices can be a complex theoretical, sociological, and philosophical task due to the intrinsic tendency to view children in terms of polar binaries, such as mature versus immature, because children's decision-making capabilities are dependent on cognitive development. Children have the right to express their views and voice their opinions on decisions that may affect them. This includes their expression of thoughts, feelings, emotions, ideas, and opinions. Children's views can have an impact on society and can make a difference in the world. The purpose of investigating children's voices is to further child agency and to help establish children's competence (Archard & Uniacke, 2020, p. 528).

Can an educator/researcher find a pedagogical approach that allows them to listen carefully to children's authentic voices and to what children really have to say? Are there different ways to support children's voices in non-verbal formats? Can children's well-being, self-esteem, self-worth, and confidence be supported through arts-based educational research?

Learning Ideas

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d.), the definition of "learning" is the act or experience of gaining knowledge, new information, and skills by "studying, practicing or being taught"; an "idea" is defined as a "thought, opinion, suggestion, or impression that comes to mind" (Merriam-Webster.com, n.d.). The focus on learning as an experience and gaining knowledge will be further defined in John Dewey's *Experience and Education* (1938), and the focus will be on the concept of an "idea" as an image or a creative thought which is in a person's mind that can be abstractly imagined. Elliot Eisner (2002) expands upon Dewey's philosophies

and an arts-based influence that learning happens with children's previous experiences when it is combined with children's interactions with both the "social and material environments" (p. 94). Lowenfeld and Brittain (1987) define learning as not only an accumulation of knowledge but also how one can understand the knowledge information they have retained and how one can utilize new knowledge in new contexts. Being creative and sensitive towards others and the surroundings can help make learning become more effective and meaningful (p. 16).

In what ways can art education and research support children's learning, idea generation, and critical thinking skills? How can children create their own ideas with, through, and about the arts in order to expand their aesthetic development and understanding, and how can they explore their feelings (Nova Scotia Department of Education, n.d.). and ultimately come up with their own understandings about art, equity, and community?

Knowledge Exchange

Knowledge exchange in this case is a process whereby information, such as ideas and experiences, are exchanged between a researcher (adult) and children. Looking at the knowledge exchanged can have an impact on the research and even assess the success of the research. Here, the term "success" is defined as the fact that children express their ideas openly with adults with confidence. Dodd-Nuifrio (2011) and the Reggio Emilia's educators' perspectives acknowledge that children are *knowledge makers* and they are creators of their own culture and knowledge (p. 236).

Is it possible to reach equal amounts of knowledge exchange in a learner–teacher relationship? Can the sharing of knowledge challenge the imbalances of power in child–adult relationships? Is it possible through art-making practices for children to share their experiences, voices, and ideas?

Literature Review

Historical and Sociological Definitions of Children

The foundations of childhood study and discussions around its complex concepts are rooted in the field of sociology. One can first look to sociology in order to gain an understanding of the basic arguments that have been used to criticize the historical and sociological constructions that have been applied to children since the beginning.

There is a lack of historical evidence, even within academia, regarding the role and position of children. Many writers have not recorded children's experiences or voices as they experienced monumental moments in time (Bucknall, 2014, p.71). Historically, children were mainly valued for their economic labour. During the 19th century and the era of industrialization, children worked to help ensure their family's survival (Sitara, 2016). In many countries, such as Great Britain, a massive influx of factories was built in urban areas during the Industrial Revolution; the subsequent need for workers led to the targeting of orphaned children or children from poor families, who were exploited as child labourers. Their working conditions were often hazardous; some, for example, worked in mines for long hours (Griffin, 2014). Many laws and parliamentary acts were passed around the mid-to-late 1800s (Robson, 2019), making it mandatory for children to receive government-funded education; one example was the 1846 Canadian Common School Act (Government of Ontario archives). However, many developing countries did not recognize human rights and educational laws regarding children in the 1800s, and it was challenging for children to receive an education. For many countries, the problem lay in the lack of funding in the education system; for others, children were valued for their labour in the fashion and mining industries, among others.

Children have been viewed as passive members of society whose opinions are rarely taken seriously (James & Prout, 2015, p. 6; Mathews, 2007, p. 324; Thompson, 2021, p. 163). Aziz (2020), for example, reports that he often heard during his childhood the phrase that "children should be seen and not heard" (p. 1). He further notes that society views children's voices or their input to the world as not valuable contributions to society because of the lack of skill and knowledge children possess in comparison to adults. Other authors such as James and Prout (2015), Haring et al. (2019), and Mathews (2007, p. 327) have also noted the historical silencing of children's voices, or what Prout and James (2015) refer to as children being a part of the "muted groups" in society (p. 6). They are a group that is "often ignored or marginalised in the wider drive to address children's participation and children's broader rights" (Blaisdell et al., 2019, p. 15). They have been stigmatized as passive beings who experience developmental stages in the process of becoming an adult (Haring et al., 2019). Only recently has there been a slow change of perspectives and theories in some countries and disciplines towards children and an increasing critique of established adult–child relationships.

It is important to briefly summarize some of the main concepts that dominated the old sociological views and methods regarding childhood in order to gain a deeper understanding of the current sociological arguments, which will be discussed shortly. Mathews (2007) distinguishes "old" sociology as the older assumptions surrounding childhood prior to the mid-1980s. Children were viewed based on how they were using their knowledge and skills to establish themselves in society and grow into adults (p. 323). Old sociology takes generalized perspectives of children's experiences and views them as a whole, giving little consideration to the social contexts individual children may find themselves in, alongside children's individual cognitive growth during their everyday experiences (pp. 325–327). Research methods and

approaches were also controversial during this time period; while researchers investigated the topic of children's voice and perspectives, they often interviewed only the caretakers, such as mothers and teachers, who spoke for children about children's issues; they never heard directly from the children themselves (p. 327). Often, when research was carried out with children, children were viewed as "passive objects to be examined, and often exploited, as research objects for adults' benefits" (Tesar, 2016, p. 4). Children were often taken to environments that were not child-friendly, such as labs for studies relating to researching primitive forms of cognition, thereby furthering old notions of children based on the 18th-century concept of "savages" (James & Prout, 2015, pp. 9–10). In other instances, children found themselves talking about things that adults wanted to hear rather than giving their authentic opinions and perspectives (Mathews, 2007).

James and Prout (2015) explain that the early studies of children (pre-1970, and as far back as the 1950s) were influenced by traditional development psychology regarding natural biological growth and child development. Such studies made use of three themes, which still currently dominate childhood studies: rationality, naturalness, and universality (Greene & Nixon, 2020, p. 5; James & Prout, 2015, pp. 8–9). Rationality is an adult-centered term whereby adulthood is universally defined as the end goal for children. Children are divided into age-based groups, and biologically determined linear stages determined their understanding of rationality at different stages. Naturalness is the evolutionary model, which focuses on a child becoming an adult. Children are viewed to have simplistic thoughts that turn into more complex or abstract thoughts. Dualistic terms appear, such as the terms "rationality" and "irrationality," which define, compare, and contrast children and adults. Universality is the dominating influence of

sociological aspects and practical structures in combination with biological and child development to define all children as a generalized whole.

Children's Rights

The United Nation's Convention Rights of a Child, adopted in 1989, is one of those recent developments where children are viewed as rightful persons in society with the help of lawful jurisdictions. Articles 12.1, 2 and 13.1 of this document states that children have the right to speak, to be listened to (especially in judicial and administrative proceedings), and to express their own views. They also have the right to receive information through a form of media of their own choosing, such as through art or through oral and/or written communication. According to Article 12, children have the right to form and express their own views and opinions about everything that concerns their own lives. The document further states that "the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child" (United Nations, 1989). The definition of "maturity" has implications from psychology and child development. The Collins Online Dictionary presents two definitions relating maturity with age; the first is the "state of being fully developed or adult" while the second is that "someone's maturity is their quality of being fully developed in their personality and emotional behaviour." These definitions imply polar tensions of maturity for adults and immaturity for children; this will be discussed further in a later section. The UN document emphasizes that adults need to listen to children and not to speak for them. Even though children's views can be impacted by their age and maturity, maturity can depend on their level of independence and their ability to grasp a certain level of understanding (Bala & Houston, 2013). The Committee of the Rights of a Child (CRC) from the 51st session provides a more in-depth analysis by saying that the "committee strongly recommends that States parties exert all efforts to listen to or seek the views of those children

speaking collectively" (United Nations, 2009, p. 5). It further stresses that "Article 12 stipulates that simply listening to the child is insufficient; the views of the child have to be seriously considered when the child is capable of forming her or his own views" (United Nations, 2009, p. 8). However, Bala and Houston (2013) point out that children's expression of views is not an obligation but a choice: children must decide for themselves whether they want to express themselves or not (p. 6). Adults should also pay attention to children's moments of silence, which can also have meaning.

The UNICEF website (unicef.org) actively demonstrates the organization's devotion to Article 13, incorporating a child-friendly text for older children to read and an animated video for younger children to watch. Using both text and video as modes of communication to explain the main articles in the Convention Rights of a Child to children further emphasizes children's right "of freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds" (United Nations, 1989). The animated video is of a family: colour-changing and blob-like characters with a pet. The rights are explained in a narrative-like manner, which also includes moments of singing, looking at changing colours, observing symbols, listening to sound effects, and interacting with dialogue, such as being asked to answer questions or to search for certain objects on the screen. The animated video is an excellent example of an organization making the effort to create something that children are able to understand. UNICEF's child-friendly approach also goes hand-in-hand with Bala and Houston's (2013) argument that children have the right to be informed of and to have support in understanding their rights. As a result of the creation and recognition of children's rights, researchers have been paying more attention towards children as social actors and as active rather than passive members in society (James & Prout, 2015, p.12). This landmark document, along with the field of childhood studies, both recognize a desire to

modernize and redefine older historical notions of children, and to involve children in this process. Children are capable of making their own decisions, participating in policy making, expressing their concerns regarding well-being, and commenting on any other topic surrounding issues that determine children's lives.

Current Studies and Methods in Childhood Studies

As researchers' interest into children's rights has increased, and as they have started to move away from traditional definitions of children—viewing them as passive beings who were only valued as tiny persons growing into adults—they looked to key terms such as "agency" instead. They also began searching for ways in which children can become active participants in society (Mathews, 2007, p. 330). These topics and many others surrounding children were considered theoretical conversation starters. Adults began embracing the point of simply "letting children be children"; the ways in which children's voices can impact a shared world between adults and children became a topic of noteworthiness. Childhood studies as an academic discipline emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. A designated child-related section appeared in the American Sociological Association in 1992, and a few years afterwards, research journals specifically regarding concepts of children and childhood started being published (Mathews, 2007, p. 322; Quennerstedt & Quennerstedt, 2014, p. 118). Childhood studies can be a difficult field to define because there is no concrete or clear definition in the sociological literature. It is a continuously emerging field (James & Prout, 2015, p.6), and sociologists within the field are forever debating philosophical concepts, ideas, methods, research approaches, and other influences from multiple disciplines including education, law, psychology, and more (Mathews, 2007, p. 330). Tesar (2016) notes that there are benefits to the vagueness of defining childhood studies; notably, its openness creates endless possibilities and interdisciplinary perspectives. This

sense of openness also allows for creative solutions to working with children, such as through the arts. Childhood studies, in a very generalized and simplified definition, is a form of child activism about childhood and children.

One of the main purposes of childhood studies is to criticize the old sociology perspectives. “New sociology” aims to challenge, re-conceptualize, and redefine childhood with a goal to better children’s well-being and welfare (Mathews, 2007, p. 331). New sociology takes into consideration some of the old sociology terms but re-examines them within more social, cultural, environmental, and political contexts. As James and Prout (2015) point out, there is a sense of urgency to reconsider definitions around childhood in specific cultural and social contexts (p. 18). Therefore, many researchers employ a social constructionist lens, which recognizes that childhood and children’s experiences differ across a wide range of contexts and societies, with the result that defining childhood will be an ongoing area of study (p. 325). In current studies, the focus is shifting to perspectives of children’s agency and children as individual social actors who exist in their own right. The child is taken seriously as an individual rather than as part of a whole. Quennersedt and Quennerstedt (2014) further argue that honouring children’s rights is the most important concept, with the next being “that children must be regarded as active, creative social agents who are both shaped by and shape their circumstances and the surrounding society” (p. 122). Children are finally regarded in research contexts as human beings as they interact with the world around them.

There have also been ongoing debates in the field about how to define “agency” (Greene & Nixon, 2020, pp. 5–6). It may be problematic to seek a single definition of agency; Greene and Nixon present multiple writers who have attempted to take on the task of defining the term, and of showing how it is manifested in different ways. One example is referring to agency in relation

to advocacy, positioning change as an end result of agency (p. 169). Change in itself is not good enough. Agency refers to power, as the dictionary definition defines an agent as someone who is acting and extorting power (Merriam-Webster.com). Greene and Nixon (2020) conclude that any definition of agency cannot exist without mentioning power. They note that children can act as agents in many circumstances as a source of motivation to get what they desire, and that in some circumstances, this may result in change. But they emphasize that any form of agency is reliant on the power relationships children find themselves in, since power can enable or suppress children's agency, with the result of either supporting children or silencing them. The expression of agency in relation to power structures and relationships must also consider the individual historical contexts of each child; a child's past experiences may influence the way the child acts out their agency depending on their relationship to the other person and new situations. These past experiences may reflect their family, community, gender, and environmental interactions. Greene and Nixon (2020) recommend taking into consideration these past experiences, and how children want to function or act depending on their self-awareness and what they choose, since choice is extremely valuable and reflects their identity as human beings (pp. 171–174). When adults begin to consider, to emphasize, and to support children's agency and become aware of power relationships and children's past experiences and sense of self, this process can begin to bridge the gap of understanding power structures between children and adults (Tesar, 2016, p. 4). Then, when children are allowed to take part as agents in research, this can further lead to child-led research, or even participatory methods, where research is created by children for children (Mann, et al., 2014, p. 285).

Universality

Talking about children's voices can be problematic because of the vast over-generalization present in child-related discourse and the sense of universal perspectives towards children. The linear way of thinking of children's biological natural and linear growth to become adults, which also includes their levels of maturity and rationality and other dualisms and ideas of children as "becomings," has dominated theoretical explanations (James & Prout, 2015, p. 9). Children have been viewed as a whole rather than as individualistic persons who exist in their unique social and cultural contexts. James and Prout (2015) have previously pondered both the biological and social as separate aspects since they view childhood as a social construction. They further suggest comparison and contrast across cultures in order to steer away from grouping childhood as a universal phenomenon (p. 9). However, theorists in the field of childhood studies are often stuck in the theoretical underpinnings without ever engaging or working with children in order to discover the diverse range of social and cultural aspects in which children experience the world. There is even less consensus on how to find practical solutions and methodologies to work with children in order to determine and support their perspectives. Aziz (2020) argues that it is essential for researchers to recognize that children bring value to all areas of society. He further suggests that it is up to adults to provide the spaces and opportunities to support children's voices so that they can be heard and are able to create, influence, and have an impact on active solutions. Aziz's argument is to make sure that children do not remain stagnant in theoretical suggestions (p. 6). James and Prout (2015) also recommend looking at empirical studies that may provide ways for researchers to focus and to make observations while working with children in order to encourage children's individualistic and active positions during research (p. 214).

Only a small number of researchers have attempted to work with practical methodologies to emphasize children's voices in combination with topics of individuality, while also including social and global contexts. One can step away from the field of childhood studies or sociology and look to artists for inspiration for further suggestions on this practical issue. Various artists and filmmakers have used cameras as a tool to help observe children, or to help adults explore the world from a child's perspective. Filmmakers like Francis Alÿs have visited a diverse range of countries, but mainly film in the developing world. Their work has taken them from snowy forests in Switzerland to urban areas in China and Brazil, to drier environments in Africa, and to war-torn zones in Afghanistan. These artists capture the commonalities of children and what they experience worldwide as they discover recurring themes of children playing together in outdoor environments and finding found objects (such as rocks, old tires, or plastic bags) to fuel their creative imaginations (such as inventing a game) while existing in a diverse set of societies and cultures. Showcasing play can also be viewed as the process whereby children are actively establishing their relationships with their surrounding environment (including socio-political) and nature, and collaborating with others.

Francis Alÿs became curious about children's perspectives after he viewed how easily they construct and enter their own fantasy worlds. His artistic interest led to an investigation in which he searched for an artistic medium to help illuminate children's ideas and imagination. He enjoys the joyful, yet unexpected, moments while collaborating with children (ArtAsiaPacific, 2020). Alÿs chooses to also include filmed footage of the children's geopolitical environments. In his film *Children's Game: Papolate #10* (Alÿs, 2011) filmed in Balkh, Afghanistan, he depicts a highly focused boy who plays with a kite made out of a white plastic bag. The boy's gestures are graceful and controlled like a dance performer as he attempts to manipulate the

kite's movement in the wind with the movement of his body. The camera shifts focus for a brief moment to a helicopter flying above, hinting at the militarized zones and geopolitical tensions where children live. In this example, the boy still plays with a kite, even though his living environment may not be deemed safe due to the political power structures or threats caused by violence from wars. What is strikingly notable is that many children are playing with found objects, such as discarded garbage, in many of Alÿs' films. This shows that children are resourceful and capable of transforming even the simplest and limited found materials, and they are able to transform them into something creative and unexpected. Children play with found objects as a means of adaptation; they are aware of their surroundings, but with the help of their imagination and creativity, they find ways to entertain themselves and seek outlets to experience joy in their own worlds. This is the case with the boy with the kite: he knows the helicopter exists, but he chooses to ignore it and continues to play.

The makers of a documentary titled *The Voices of Children* (Hall et al., 2017). Filmed in Brazil, also used cameras as a tool to explore children's voices and daily lives. In this case, they attached small cameras onto harnesses, which the children wore. Essentially, the recordings showed the individual child's perspective (eye view). The filmmakers chose to include two sets of recordings: their own, where the camera was held by one of the team members, and the footage made by the children. In the documentary there is evidence of minimal adult interaction. The focus is child-centered, given that the camera was located at lower angles on the child, which recorded the child's literal view and conversations. This is in contrast to Alÿs' videos, which were composed of shots from higher angles, showing an adult's point of view. Understanding a child's perspective can be about using tools to help document what children have to say, but it can also be about viewing the world from lower angles to gain a more literal

sense of their point of view and possibly surprise adults, who may see things they have never viewed before.

One key critique of the artists described above regards the authenticity of individual children's voices while in front of a camera versus what they would say off-camera, or even while no adult is present. The children are aware of being the focus of attention when an entire camera crew follows them around during their adventurous playtimes. It can be said with certainty that most of the children would have come up with individual efforts and attempts to keep the camera aimed towards them. Alÿs recognizes this critique and comments that children are the best actors because they are all natural actors, showing off in front of the camera (ArtAsiaPacific, 2020). There is, therefore, a need for some degree of caution with regard to how children's voices are described at a moment in time, and whether they are authentic or not. This is in contrast to some of the traditional research interviews with children, such as in the fields of sociology or psychology, where children are on the spot and under too much pressure. The child may be keen to get out of the situation as soon as possible and may therefore say what adults would like to hear, or may not act like their normal selves.

What stands out about Alÿs' child-centered films is where he chooses to exhibit them. His project series titled, *The Nature of the Game* (Alÿs, 2022) is an ongoing project that was recently on display at the 59th Venice Biennale 2022 in the Belgian Pavilion. The Venice Biennale can be described as a form of Olympics for artists, which receives significant global attention. Alÿs is actively presenting the presence of children and their perspectives to a vast audience to begin to make people aware of the emerging perspectives surrounding children, and how one can work with children by simply listening to their perspectives or watching how they interact with the world. While working internationally and picking out common themes that

children share worldwide, Alÿs has found that children are capable of sharing their individual stories and perspectives, even while living in unstable circumstances. It is enlightening to know that artists have looked to artistic methods and tools to boldly tackle the task of incorporating children's individual voices and perspectives on society at a moment in time where children seem to be more like themselves, playing and being joyful in their imaginative worlds.

Dualisms

James and Prout (2015) argue that implicit binaries exist within many theories related to children, especially in psychological and sociological fields. Many terms are used to contrast what adults *are* with what children *are not*, such as terms used to describe children as "lacking of" the adult concepts. Mackay (1991) includes some definitions from socialization perspectives by regarding children as "incomplete, immature, irrational, incompetent, asocial and acultural" (Mackay, 1991 p. 28) and adults as "complete, mature, rational, competent, social and autonomous" (Mackay, 1991, p. 28). Huang (2019) also uses similar terms while defining adults versus children as she notes, "adults are viewed as mature, rational and competent whereas children are viewed as immature, dependent and vulnerable" (Huang, 2019, p. 100). Many of the terms relate to themes of the constraints of time (growth relating to the "becoming" child, which will be discussed in more depth in the next section) and how children are viewed in social constructions.

The traditional functionalist socialization theories refer directly to polar binary terms to help accept the values and norms in society. Mackay (1991) argues that these binaries, such as defining children as incomplete beings, come from adult dominating perspectives, which further an adult bias towards defining children. He notes it can be problematic to even begin to discuss adult and child interactions when socialization, scientific methods, and social norms exist and are

in the way (Mackay, 1991, p. 27). James and Prout (2015) also argue that there is a failure to match theoretical and practical methods while working with children because of the over-emphasis on adult-led goals, which is for children to align with the social order (p.11). These binaries dominated by adult definitions create a danger of over-generalizing and creating a sense of universality regarding anything related to children. It also gets in the way of establishing a true balance between child and adult relationships, because these differences are creating a roadblock for children and adults to share a common interpretation of the world (Mackay, 1991, p. 29). Children cannot contribute to society if they are confined strictly by the social structures and norms defined by adults, who hold automatic presumptions about childhood that are influenced by these dualistic terms. Without any input, voices, or a sense of agency from children to being active members in society, they remain stuck as passive persons in society. In an extreme sense, to eliminate all adult or perspectives about children may be a naïve task and would require a restructuring of traditional social structures if it were to be considered in practice. However, focusing on finding a balance within child–adult relationships can be a more realistic undertaking, where researchers will be willing to find methods or approaches to support children in how they define what a child is or is not. After all, children have a right under Article 12 of the UN Convention Rights of the Child to express their opinions about anything that concerns them.

Being and Becoming

The terms “being” and “becoming” are important concepts in the fields of childhood studies and education. They refer mainly to concepts of children’s biology in combination with topics of time, space, agency, and power structures within the relationships between child and adult worlds. Traditional concepts of childhood are often defined as “becoming,” but more

recently, emerging studies have discussed definitions of children using the term "being." The term "becoming" is often associated with the concepts of growth, such as biological growth and ageing of a child, with adulthood as the end goal. This includes both regarding the child of the present time as practicing the adult skills they are lacking (such as adult rationality, maturity, and other adult dualisms), as well as the time of the future, when children are deemed to be adults or at least are considered to be "finished products" who have successfully obtained understanding of these adult structures according to society (Huang, 2019, pp. 99–100; Uprichard, 2008, pp. 304).

Researchers have defined "being" as taking place in the present moment. James and Prout (2015) suggest re-defining childhood to focus on children during the present moment and to carefully consider temporal (such as time and growth) and spatial (such as local and cultural) contexts (p. 214). Children are viewed as active participants with a sense of agency, who are capable of sharing their own experiences ideas, opinions, and world views. These can be factors for children to desire change in society, and therefore, to become active agents in the social world, which may result in empowering children to have more control over their own growth and development at their individual pace (James & Prout, 2015, p. 215; Uprichard, 2008, p. 304). "Being" children are accepted as they are, in the current moment, social actors who are capable of defining their everyday experiences or environments around them. Essentially the common phrase "let kids be kids" is relevant to the definition of being (Huang, 2019, pp. 99–100; Uprichard, 2008, p. 311). Uprichard (2008) is one of the few researchers who actively supports children's agency by asking children questions around the topics of being older or becoming adults and what it means to them. Some children looked forward to growing up because they could go shopping on their own, while some children thought adulthood was boring. However, it

is interesting to note that some of the children also commented that they do see change, that the world around them changes, and that they as individuals can also change (pp. 309–310). Uprichard (2008), however, further raises a concern that relying on the term "being" can be problematic because it ignores the future of the child. Although there may be clear distinctions between both terms, both Uprichard and Huang (2019) have pondered the idea of finding a balance between both terms and using both "being" and "becoming" with an emphasis on time and agency to create more space for children to participate actively, and to empower them as they reflect on the world around them (Uprichard, 2008, p. 310). Huang (2019) describes this use of both terms as "interpretive reproduction" (pp. 101–102), where both adult and child worlds can co-exist, while still recognizing children as a group of human beings on their own with their own perspectives and values.

This way of thinking, incorporating both terms together, is important for children's education. If there is too much focus on the "becoming" child, then educators lose the "being" child (Huang, 2019, p. 99). It has long been the case in the education system that children learn adult-based curricula, which include subjects of interest to adults, with the expectation that children will complete adult-desired tasks or skills (such as take examinations or learn workplace skills) in preparation for adulthood. Biological age also plays a factor in that children are categorized in education systems according to age groups; this is seen in national curricula, where certain responsibilities, duties, privileges, and moral behaviours become an expectation for children (James & Prout, 2015, p. 208).

French actress, writer, and filmmaker Clara Bellar's 2017 documentary *Being and Becoming* is an example of a researcher making an effort to step away from traditional forms of education of the "becoming" child, to focus on child- and learner-centered education as a form of

agency to support the "being" child. With an emphasis on children growing in their local environments, supported by adults, the documentary is about exploring the main concepts of creativity, authenticity, self-esteem, and free-thinking for the child. Bellar was inspired by the term "autonomous learning" in homeschooling contexts, which she defines as a non-traditional way of learning. It is learning by engaging with the environment and the concepts of life learning, where children are learning about the self. It is about children being their own individual persons with their own internal curiosities, which motivate them to learn and investigate their topics of interest. There are other types of learning which they bring forth, such as self-motivated, experience-based, interest-led, and natural learning. Bellar interviews various families who homeschool, as well as artists such as Arno Stern and educators, to obtain more perspectives on her investigations.

The interviews are limited in terms of diversity because the individuals and families are mainly intellectuals located in Western countries, such as France, Germany, the USA, and the UK, and a majority of the parents work in education-based environments, such as universities, museums, or artist circles. Children took part in the interviews, but it was mainly adults or parents who spoke about their experiences. There were only a few instances of young adults reflecting on their childhood. Despite these shortcomings, many families bring up interesting discussions about their children's learning experiences. One family note how they dissolved the importance often found in traditional schooling on evaluation and testing, focusing instead on the topics the children were interested in, and viewed learning as continuous rather than set in strict schedules. They also viewed learning as full of spontaneous opportunities, such as discovering a bug in a forest. Another family contemplates the discussion of whether learning comes from intrinsic motivation (inner desires) or from external influences (such as the surrounding

environment) to help children figure out their interests and what they want to become when they are older. The parent argues that they also would not teach their children subjects if they did not ask about them; instead, they would only support their children's inner desires when they took interest in a certain subject.

The artist Arno Stern comments that children are knowledge inventors, and are natural explorers and discoverers, and it is the educator's responsibility to support them. He says, "Children are explorers, they're discoverers, they have a lot of curiosity. Nobody should channel their curiosity, nobody should impose discoveries on children, but rather be very attentive to them" (Bellar, 2017, 44:00). He further stresses children having an inherent creative ability, such as a natural inclination towards drawing, and their creativeness is full of endless potential and possibilities. Homeschooling options are becoming more limited because it is illegal in many places that have strict laws or regulations regarding who can teach and the type of curricula and pedagogical methods that educators can use. This can make it difficult for children to explore different ways of learning and to make meaningful connections to their life experiences. If governments regulate education with nationwide "becomings," then there will be fewer chances for children to participate in exploratory learning to "be." Do children get any say in how or where they want their education to take place or come from?

Many other artists and other types of schooling, such as Reggio Emilia schools, also emphasize child-led learning and the importance of creativity in the hope of being supportive of the "being" child; this will be discussed in a later section.

Figure 1

Simplified Dualisms Charts

Children viewed as...	**Children are not...**
Asocial	Social
Becomings	Beings
Irrational	Rational
Vulnerable	Capable of decision making
Acultural	Cultural

Child	**Adult**
Incomplete	Complete
Incompetent	Competent
Immature	Mature
Passive members in society	Active members in society
Dependent	Independent
Irrational behaviour	Rational behaviour
Learner	Teacher
Vessels of knowledge	Keepers of knowledge
Compelled to act by forces	Autonomous

Childhood and Arts-Based Educational Research

As stated in previous sections, few researchers have explored practical methods to amplify children's voices, agency, and perspectives. Some of the practical and real-world examples have been executed by artists and filmmakers, who have used arts-based methods with the help of tools such as the camera for children to create forms of documentation from their own perspectives. Arts-based and education authors have further criticized the historical and old sociological perspectives and the impact the old attitudes have on children and their education. John Dewey (1859–1952) and Elliot Eisner (1933–2014) are two prominent arts-based figures who have thoroughly criticized the spaces where children learn and how they acquire knowledge, and how children are not able to share their voices in their educational environments and through

nationwide curricular objectives. Multiple arts-based authors have looked to Dewey and Eisner for inspiration and for direction on how to support children in order to help make children's learning experiences more valuable for them. This will be explained in a later section, but first, it is important to view the main ideas and concepts of Dewey and Eisner, and the criticisms they put forward.

John Dewey

John Dewey was an American philosopher, psychologist, pragmatist, social reformer, and most notably, an educator. He seriously criticized traditional forms of education and made suggestions to create a new form of education that would be more supportive to children and their learning experiences. Dewey described experiences as objective and internal when an individual interacts with their needs (such as personal goals, desires, and purpose) in a space, place, and time with their surrounding environments (Dewey, 1938, pp. 42–44). His main focus was on experiences; he supported the view that experiences can be viewed as motivators to growth. This can be problematic because when humans rely on experiences, both good and bad, as motivators for future learning experiences, this can influence future growth.

Dewey criticized the way in which traditional education functioned, with its many adult-orientated goals. The purpose of traditional education was to push children towards maturity. Subjects and methods of learning were taught to children to prepare for short-term and product-orientated end goals, such as tests, examinations, or the completion of projects; it is questionable whether that tested knowledge would ever be used again. There was an emphasis on instructing and on telling children how to behave, talk, be silent, follow routines, and learn from textbooks, which may result in negative experiences for children. Passing an exam or test proved the achievement of these expected skills as the final product of education (Dewey, 1938, pp. 47–48).

There was a lack of insight into child involvement during their development and subject information which was taught (Dewey, 1938, pp. 18–19). Each child was expected to behave and learn in the same way nationwide, furthering the notion of children as passive beings who were generalized as a whole because children studying from the same textbooks created a sense of social unity. The learning material was externalized and separated from children's individual experiences and was not related or relevant to their actual experiences of their everyday lives or local environments (Dewey, 1938, p. 48). Dewey understood the spaces of classrooms and schools as active societies and recognized that "educators must pay attention to the unique experience of children. This is an experience that can only be understood within the context of each child" (Dodd-Nufrio, 2011, p. 237).

In order to make education more relevant to children's individual lives and personal experiences, there was a need to seek new approaches to education. However, any new approach creates new problems that need new solutions (Dewey, 1938, pp. 21–22). It would require restructuring education to allow for more creative, open-ended goals and to think of other education partners, such as community members (social engagement), who would be willing to take part in the educational journey. It may be a messy process and may require a navigation of what works or does not work. It is also a journey into the unknown and uncertainty because it would all be so new and open to multiple possibilities. Dewey recommended a new form of education, which he described as "progressive" education. By connecting education with personal experiences as a new area of philosophy within educational fields, he noted some sort of hybrid between empirical and experimental philosophies (Dewey, 1938, p. 25). However, he accepted that there would be challenges when creating this new progressive education because it

would be an emerging field. There would be no concrete methods, materials, and social relationships (Dewey, 1938, p. 29).

As adults look for ways to support children according to Dewey's new education philosophies, Dewey emphasized the role of the educator in taking on the responsibility of navigating new approaches and methods, providing resources and materials, and choosing environmental settings, while working with the proper tools to create good, worthwhile, and quality educational experiences (Dewey, 1938, p. 45). He also suggested that it is the task of the educator to understand individuals' needs and past experiences, so that educators are able to think ahead to the children's future experiences (Dewey, 1938, pp. 71–72). He encouraged educators to come up with questions or problems that require growth, something for children to think about that is not too easy or too hard, so that children do not become bored or frustrated, but instead are inspired and gain an interest and eagerness to create and continue learning (Dewey, 1938, p. 79). There should be a balance between mental and physical stimulation (Dewey, 1938, p. 63). This can seem daunting with the number of responsibilities that Dewey affords the educator. It requires work, time, and energy for the educator to plan and reach out to community resources. The demands of work and labour call for more individuals to take part and collaborate to create a creative Dewey-inspired empirical and experimental form of education.

Elliot Eisner

Elliot Eisner was an artist who was interested in how the education system was structured, and who pursued a career as a high school teacher. He became interested in artistic methods and in ways to incorporate them into children's educational experiences. To further this curiosity, he continued to research and write books and papers on the impact of arts-based methods on all aspects of education and children's learning processes. He believed that the arts

created a space for children to establish deeper and more meaningful learning opportunities by revealing new perspectives and ways of seeing things, which ultimately led to furthering the development of children's imagination. Eisner agreed with Dewey that experience is the foundation to growth and education. He also agreed that art is a human experience, and individuals can gain valuable learning experiences by connecting their education through community environments and interactions (Eisner, 2002, p. 5–10).

Eisner criticized standard curriculum development, saying that the goals and aims of curricula should not be defined by policy makers, as the education system is influenced by adult-led worlds, including society, economics, and politics (Eisner, 2002, p. 164). There is a sense of universality where curricular goals are set to nationally desired outcomes, expectations, and standards and lack attention to local community contexts, resulting in a lack of diversity (p. 162). He recommended that educators take alternative routes and make relationships beyond school environments, such as with the local community. Curricular aims should respond to children's interests and learning needs (i.e., they should be learner-centered) (Eisner, 2002). Eisner suggested that educators focus on making connections, discovering imagination, reflecting on emotional feelings (empathy), and exploring sensory stimuli to further impact children's development and sense of identity (Eisner, 2002, p. 1). He claimed that when art influences children's sensory experiences, such as sight, sound, touch, etc., in combination with imagination, it creates playfulness and positive learning experiences (Eisner, 2002, p. 4). However, the sensory system cannot work alone; it has to work hand-in-hand with the tools of culture, such as the arts and language, to create a sense of self-identity. He noted that imagination is crucial to cognitive development and cultural development, especially for pre-school and primary school children (Eisner, 2002, p. 198).

Eisner made similar recommendations for educators as Dewey, but he offered specific suggestions directly related to visual arts methods. He implied it is the educator's responsibility to create spaces where an educator and a child can co-construct learning. This suggests a need to find ways to take child–adult relationships seriously. He also advocated making learning information relevant to local communities, so children can make clearer connections to their environments. Educators should be attentive to children's needs and should scaffold learning, such as asking for cues or stepping in when children need help during the learning process. Educators should also be flexible with their schedules, finding a balance between routine and embracing the unexpected or unknown (Eisner, 2002). To move away from traditional forms of education, such as examinations, he suggested the use of portfolios and viewing education-related material processes over longer periods of time.

Research Methods, Approaches, and Pedagogies

The emerging ideas of researching *with* children rather than *on* children has become increasingly popular (Bucknall, 2014, p. 69). Artists and art philosophers such as Dewey (1938) and Eisner (2002) used arts-based methods as a tool or gateway to discover ways to combine experimental and empirical ideas to reveal some of the prerequisites needed when thinking about potential practical solutions. Given the lack of case studies working with children, and as well as the emerging yet vague practices of both childhood studies and diverse art educational philosophies, it may be difficult to define or point to concrete methodologies that could be successful when working with children.

Research-creation as a qualitative research method is one example of an approach that forms both academic theories and creative practices to help investigate, develop, and create knowledge with an artistic lens. Research-creation can be difficult to define, as it is an emerging

field of research that uses a lot of interdisciplinary approaches. Visual research methods are helpful while working with children because there is an awareness and a sense of openness to diverse ways of thinking. In research-creation there is an emphasis on the process with themes of "going with the flow" (data as ongoing and continuous), flexibility, and experimental approaches while working with children (Pahl & Pool, 2021, pp. 658–659). It is a research method that is concerned with what is to come and what will emerge during the process. It is not too concerned with a pre-defined hypothesis, clear templates, or expected outcomes; rather it is embracing the unknown and the "in the making" processes.

Using both arts-based, place-based, and participatory research approaches can be suitable for mixing and borrowing approaches and ideas from a variety of sources within the themes of research-creation. Arts-based research uses arts as an explorative approach; this includes engagement in the environment, exploration of sensory moments, and furthering of embodied learning. In both arts-based and place-based methods, it is important to focus on a diverse and unique set of practices that arise and that are waiting for further investigation. This approach offers new perspectives on observing, analyzing, thinking, and reflection through arts-based methods of interpretations and creative outlets, which can reach a broader audience in multiple areas (Emme & Kirova, 2017, p. 232; Smithbell, 2010, p.1599). Participatory research methods use interviews and participants taking photos as helpful tools to achieve practical solutions while working with and collecting from participants.

Arts-Based Research

Leavy, (2018) defines arts-based research (ABR) as a "transdisciplinary approach to knowledge building that combines the tenets of the creative arts in research contexts" (p. 4). This research method appeals to researchers in the social sciences and arts-based fields as an

innovative interdisciplinary approach that focuses on creativity, and playful and collaborative efforts (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2018, pp. 1–4; Cahnmann-Taylor, 2018, p. 254). ABR applies not only to the visual arts such as drawing, painting, printmaking, photography, and sculpture, but also incorporates practices from other arts disciplines, such as dance, drama, short stories, poetry, scripts, and theatre. Therefore, ABR takes on a hybrid approach, often in a holistic way and with a focus on the engagements of the arts to new meaning-making and ways of knowing. As new perspectives are explored, more ideas and concepts are discovered; this is followed by asking more questions, furthering a deeper level of inquiry. ABR is about human responses and experiences within the natural world and how each individual interprets the world which shapes and transforms identities creating new experiences (Rolling, 2013, p. 53). Researchers define ABR not necessarily as a methodology but as a paradigm, where it tries to move away from traditional forms of research and focus on accessibility to larger audiences, even outside of academic realms, and embrace more empirical processes (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2018, p. 10; Leavy, 2018, p. 4; Rolling, 2013, pp. 7–8). Leavy encourages ABR practitioners to be aware of and execute general skills, including having a sense of flexibility and openness while working with creativity; the approach may be one of trial and error. Other skills include being able to think conceptually and metaphorically (p.11). There is a need to consider "cultural forces that execute power" (Cahnmann-Taylor & Siegesmund, 2018, p. 9) and what the author defines as ethical "good practices" while being aware of concepts of emotional and physical well-being, care, moral values, and democratic rights (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2018, p. 251; Rolling, 2013, p. 43).

Participatory Methods

Collaborating with children in participatory methods during case studies enables co-creation between children and adults and has become one of the more popular methods used when working with children in research contexts (Montgomery, 2014, p. 133). Montgomery (2014) describes this approach as "hanging out" with children and actively paying attention to children's daily lives and their perspectives on the world (p. 124). Researchers should look to both listening and supporting children's voices and power (Pascal & Bertram, 2014, p. 270). Leavy (2018) argues that ABR views participants and researchers as equal collaborators with mutual understanding, which challenges traditional child–adult relationships and, in theory, strives for non-hierarchical positioning of all parties (Leavy, 2018, p. 10; Simon, 2010, p. 269). The aim of participatory methods is to ethically and authentically include children during research and view them as active collaborators (Pascal & Bertram, 2014, p. 269). Some challenges may arise while working with children, such as practical issues (how to verbally communicate with younger children who may not be able to verbally express themselves), as well as ethical considerations, whereby children are regarded more seriously within society, taking into consideration the child's rights (Montgomery, 2014, p. 125; Pascal & Bertram, 2014, p. 269). Ethical considerations may lead to lengthy administration processes, such as filling out forms and applications for an ethics committee. Other barriers may occur during the recruitment process, such as finding families and children willing to volunteer and work with a stranger (Montgomery, 2014, p. 132). Simon (2010) offers a solution to help connect researchers and participants: reaching out to other community participants, such as institutions with similar goals and aims, and participating in further community engagement and dialogue. She recommends looking to educational departments in institutions, which may be more willing to collaborate

with co-creative projects because they tend to be more "responsive to and collaborate with community partners and program participants" (p. 274). Montgomery (2014) and Pascal and Bertram (2014) mention some of the technological tools that can be used to support participant observation, such as the use of cameras and asking children to take photos (Pascal and Bertram, 2014, p. 281; Montgomery, 2014, p. 126).

Participatory Action Research

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a qualitative research method where participants and researchers collaborate together to offer critical perspectives around topics in social issues. The purpose of the method is to investigate and understand areas of society to further change and make improvements in the world locally, socially, culturally, politically, economically (Baum et al, 2006, p. 854) PAR challenges power dynamics between the researcher and the participants by reducing power imbalances and giving agency to the participants and emphasis on shared knowledge (Baum et al, 2006, p. 855). Participants are taken seriously in all stages of the research since participants actively take part in the creating, discussing, problem-solving, analyzing processes and they decide what can be done with the data at the end of the study. Susskind et al, (2018) note a few considerations while working with PAR research methods. Researchers can consider ethics where there are responsibilities, morals, and expectations to be followed such as realizing community (or participants) desires and questions (p. 133). Researchers are encouraged to embrace a sense of openness, the unexpected, and to be supportive of the participants' needs, desires, and respecting participants' requested diverse range methods of working or communicating preferences while working together. Methods may include storytelling, narrative techniques, case studies and photovoice (pp. 133-134).

Approaches to Listening and Documentation

In order for a researcher to truly pay attention to children's authentic voices, and to help balance child–adult (teacher–learner) relationships, it is important that the educator gives space for the child to become the teacher. When listening is accomplished, then the focus shifts to children's sense of value in the community, which strengthens their confidence and the "children's self-learning and the learning achieved by the group of children and adults together" (Rinaldi, 2012, p. 237). Children's learning, social interactions, conversational skills, problem-solving skills, and so forth are explored while working with other children in social environments. In order for this to happen, the researcher must know the right moments to remain quiet and to authentically listen to a child. Learner-centered pedagogies, such as the Reggio Emilia approach, emphasize "pedagogies of relationships and listening" (p. 234). The author defines listening as "an active verb, which involves interpretation, giving meaning to the message, and valuing those who are listened to by others" (p. 235). When the learning is shared as knowledge from children, then "this attitude of the child means that the child is a real researcher" (p. 239).

The Loris Malaguzzi International Center is an innovative public documentation centre with theoretical foundations in Reggio Emilia approaches (which will be explained in further detail in a later section). It is a centre where community members, educators, and children exchange education-related material and where the focus is on group learning. The Center has various exhibition spaces called "ateliers," which revolve around a theme; for example, the Ray of Light Atelier includes interactive components where children and visitors can play and explore objects and materials, such as different coloured lights. According to the website, this exhibition was created through an interdisciplinary collaboration between architects, scientists,

and educators, who strive to expand exploratory knowledge regarding concepts of human and scientific ways of thinking and how these can be explored with different languages; they refer to Malaguzzi's poem *The Hundred Languages of Children*. The Festive Thought Atelier is research focused, with an emphasis on documents created by children aged 2–6 years; included here are drawings, writings, stories to explore visual and metaphorical symbolism, and children's elaborations.

Artist and educator, Szekely (2022) argues that to view children as unique individuals who are capable of sharing their exciting or unusual ideas, discuss their creative plans in order become independent artists (p. 17). Children become the teachers. When adults listen and trust children as artists, they are empowering them by encouraging them to come up their own inquiry questions which further leads to deeper investigations that finalizes into their own discovery and imagination with self-confidence (p. 18).

The Mosaic Approach

Author, Alison Clark emphasizes listening methods while working in research with children. She views children and adults working together and sharing narratives (Clark, 2017, p. 17). She defines listening as a "process of communication involving hearing, interpreting and constructing meanings, not limited to the spoken word, participation in wider decision-making processes" (Clark, 2017, p. 23). Her work is inspired by Reggio Emilia and the hundred languages by looking to other forms of communication that children use such as symbolic forms that can be expressed beyond verbal communication in order to capture children's everyday experiences (Clark, 2014, p. 200). Clark looks to incorporate visual practices such as photography, art and mapping and other practices such as child-led tours, interviews with open ended questions, and observational accounts (Clark, 2017, pp. 34-37).

She suggests a multi-modal, hybrid approach where she combines various techniques by combining traditional research approaches with other alternative approaches such as participatory methodsand other visual methods (Clark, 2017, p. 25). The main goals and guidelines of the Mosaic approach are that children are viewed as experts in their own lives, skillful communicators, rights holders and meaning-makers (Clark, 2017, p. 20). The Mosaic approach idea stemmed from historical mosaics where small tiles or pieces, when viewed from afar make up a whole image. Therefore, the sum of all the pieces can make a whole image easier to understand. She explains this mosaic analogy and applies it as a fundamental research approach. She notes, "there can be value in examining one piece, for example, interviews with children may reveal important insights into their experiences. However, a more detailed image can be gained from drawing on a number of different methods or pieces. These pieces can be brought together to compose an image of an individual child" (Clark, 2010, p. 32). Where there is emphasis on holistic perspectives with an emphasis on the whole and well-being of a child. The Mosaic approach is divided into two stages; number one being children and adults gathering documentation together. The second stage is "piecing together information for dialogue, reflection and interpretation" (Clark, 2017, p. 56). Her suggestions for researchers working with children is to focus on the type of language that is used while speaking to children. Other suggestions include being alert at all times, look for moments of silence and to allow spaces for children to respond and communicate (Clark, 2014, p. 206).

Visuality and listening

Helen Lomax is another author who is also inspired by Reggio Emilia philosophies and the idea that children**'s** voices can be communicated in different modes of expressions. Lomax listens carefully to children's voices while working with visual based and participatory-based

methods during research. One of Lomax's most recent projects was working with children-during the COVID-19 global pandemic. She criticized that some of the UK politicians and governments did not allow for anyone under the age of 18 to submit pandemic inquiries, further silencing children's voices and concerns during a historical moment in time. Children were viewed as "passive recipients of policies in the face of the pandemic" (Lomax et al, 2022, p. 21). Which further stresses children's passive positions in society and lack of involvement when it comes to governmental policies such as lockdowns.

Even though Lomax could not work with children in person due to the pandemic restrictions, she sought to digital and visual-based methods as a solution. Visual practices such as drawing, filmmaking, animation was used as methods for collecting creative data on online platforms. The purpose of her research was for children from diverse backgrounds to be given the chance to reflect on their lived experiences, "as well as their perspectives on the impacts of government policy on them, their relationships and education" (Lomax et al, 2022, p. 22). Lomax sample of participants was focused on lower income-based communities who did not always have the resources since they point to disadvantaged families who were the ones that were most impacted by the lockdowns and school closures and were "at greater risk mental-ill health and learning loss" (Lomax et al, 2022, p. 23) and not having access to digital and educational resources such as computers.

Lomax further criticizes the process of research and the impact of working with visual-based methods. Since there is an emphasis on ethics, Lomax notes ethics can sometimes create challenging barriers in terms of anonymity while working with participatory and visual methods to give voice. Using visual methods of filmmaking and photo taking makes it hard to create anonymity because of the nature of the tools of cameras of first-hand accounts and primary

sources. Some examples can include children taking photos or filming themselves, friends and family members in private spaces such as the home. The problem of anonymity with visual methods can impact the aesthetic and meaning of visual data such as photos or film practices. Anonymity can de-humanize the participants. Participants may want to be recognized because they want to claim ownership of their contributions towards the research (Lomax, 2015, p.5).

It can be problematic to present the visual research results created by children when it is displayed in out-of-context spaces or showcased to an adult audience (Lomax, 2015, p. 2) Lomax hints to some of her anxieties while allowing children to have control and power during the analysis and editing process of the children's film recordings. She respects the children's choice to leave unedited films as the final project. But she is nervous that lengthy films demand longer attention spans from audiences who may become disinterested and dismiss interest into visual practices (Lomax, 2015, p. 10). There is also a danger of children's works not living up to adult expectations of regarding children's works as depicting innocent, cute, nature-based settings, and pet topics (Lomax, 2015, p. 11) She suggests that researchers look to find a balance by looking to child participants' needs and at the same time recognizing that adult expectations can conflict with children have to say (Lomax, 2015, p. 12).

Place-Based Methods

Vander Ark et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of exposing children to a community which promotes the main goals of public education: agency, equity, and community. According to the authors, "agency requires self-knowledge, social awareness and a sense of place and time" (p. 10). They further emphasize that there is a need for children to feel ownership and a sense of being valued in a space in order to begin their journey towards deeper learning experiences (p. 10). Equity is highlighted as the most important goal when working with children in research. It

is the creation of "environments where students are seen, valued and heard" (p. 11). It helps learners gain a sense of self-confidence and an identity when they feel supported and treated with respect. Arts-based methods presented in a community can help create a way to dismantle barriers caused by racism and differences in economic backgrounds and challenging social situations (Chappell & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2013, p. 256). Community can further children's learning by creating bonds, personalizing learning, building capital, and promoting contribution (Vander Ark et al., 2020, p. 12). Davies (2014) agrees and argues that communities are emerging spaces where there is room for individuals to explore any and many possibilities of thinking and further experiment with practical ideas (p. 6).

Nature-Based Methods

Nature-based methods bridge the art world with the social sciences in research. Nature-based methods are parallel to place-based methods because they value the same goals and have deeply rooted foundations in community and local environments. Before children can be asked to become agents of change (for example, finding ways to help preserve nature, such as finding environmentally friendly methods to dispose of waste, or raising awareness of endangered species due to loss of habitat), they first need to establish a relationship with nature. Doing so helps to create more authentic incentives for children to become stewards of the earth, filled with love, care, and appreciation towards nature (Inwood, 2008, p. 30). Nature-based methods are about individuals developing strong, personal, and meaningful relationships with nature.

Judson (2015) argues that when children are able to focus on the present moment, the here and now while being in nature, they will be able to explore their bodily and sensory experiences, thus make emotional connections with the surrounding natural world (p. 23). She argues in favour of walking curricula to explore nature experiences such as her educational

guidebook, titled, *a walking curriculum* (Judson, 2018). The term "imagination" can bring up concepts of awe and wondering; it offers endless possibilities of interpretation and understanding of the ecological world. Imagination is an important key concept in fields such as ecological education when thinking about new paths of interactions with nature (Judson, 2015, p. 18). Judson notes that educators can help shift perspectives towards nature and help unlearn old perspectives; it is necessary to redefine the relationship between humans and nature, otherwise children's understanding will be limited (p. 15). According to old views, nature exists for humans to use, such as the extraction of resources in order to manufacture a consumer product. A new perspective would be to view nature for nature's sake: it exists on its own. Judson is one of the few researchers who provide practical suggestions for the application of ecological considerations to current educational curricula. She suggests keeping things simple, having children explore the outdoors, and keeping learning environments local. Educators can also consider the cultural context where children are living and learning in order to emphasize a sense of place. They should explore their senses and pay attention to their emotional and physical responses, which may include humour, playing, making music, noticing patterns, and being active with the body (p. 23).

Eco-Artists

Ecological artists and land artists create eco-artworks which are made with the land and natural materials and which focus on relationships between humans and nature. Eco-art, also known as environmental art, is artwork that aims to bring awareness to diverse social, political, and environmental concerns. Eco-artists hit the nail on the head, so to speak, in that they cover all themes that are present in place-based methods, nature-based methods, and ecology-based education. This unique group of artists cover a wide range of themes; they combine community,

sense of place, human-body interactions, temporality, and natural materials to make artworks. UK-based artist Andy Goldsworthy is a prominent eco-artist who transforms and rearranges natural materials into sophisticated, often ephemeral, works of art. He collects and works with all types of natural and found materials, such as rocks, clay, sticks, leaves, sand, snow, ice, and whatever else he finds close by. His artworks force him to slow down, take his time, exercise patience, and build his appreciation of small things. Often, he creates in outdoor environments, and he allows exposure to the elements to create and transform the final piece. He documents this process over time with a camera and photos. The theme of the unknown comes up in many of his works, since he surrenders his power and allows nature to take over. In the documentary *Rivers and Tides* (Riedelsheimer, 2006) he says, "this is my work, too many unknowns" (22:35).

Arts-Based Curricula

In traditional education systems the educator is the keyholder and knowledge keeper who passes knowledge on to children. To use a visual metaphor, children are viewed as empty vessels waiting to be filled with adult-based knowledge and information. As Rolling (2013) argues, it is time to "rethink the purpose of arts in curriculum, as well as the nature of curriculum itself" (p. 61). There is an urgency to challenge current curricular strategies in order for children to gain centre stage, to become architects of their own learning with the help of the arts.

Children may be more willing to engage in dialogue while looking to the arts as a means to express themselves creatively (Clumpner, 2021, p. 23). Allowing children to take part in the curriculum processes is a start in the process of children taking ownership, such as power and agency, to construct their own life experiences, wants, desires, interests, and imagination, and to explore their own development and growth (Huang, 2019, p. 102). Current curricula are full of predetermined schedules and curricular goals that add time pressure and make learning feel

mechanical, but by considering other curricular approaches, educators can help to support children to learn in their own way and time. Rolling emphasizes looking to children's experience to create a more meaningful curriculum and learning spaces. He argues, "Life and experiences write its own curriculum, differently for each student, yet always in some way brought into intersection with the learner's daily schooling experience; life and daily activity does not adhere to the lesson plans educators write before the students' arrival" (Rolling, 2013, p. 61).

Educators can be supportive by helping children move along their growing journey at the present time by promoting their independence and confidence in the arts (Eisner, 2002, p. 73). Eisner's (2002) recommendation to educators is to follow child- and learner-centered methods where there is a need for educators to incorporate quality and creative art curricula (Clumpner, 2021, p. 22). The arts also promote children's body knowledge by helping them to recognize how the body and emotions react to an artwork, such as a painting. Arts also create opportunities for exploring art relationships, such as colours, or how the parts of a painting make a whole (Eisner, 2002, p. 76), or even multi-sensory relationships, such as synesthesia (p.86). The arts help children gain an understanding that artists have a voice and that children also have something to share (Eisner, 2002, p. 24).

A child-centered approach in a curriculum can challenge many power relationships within educational institutions; it can even extend to other stakeholders, such as policy makers. A documentary titled *If children Could Design Their Own Schools* (Tsai, 2013) documented an experimental approach whereby young adults were allowed to take control and design their own curriculum and learning methods. The young adults chose a topic of interest, became experts in the topic, created a visual presentation about what they had learned, such as a PowerPoint, a video, or a poster, and shared what they thought would be valuable knowledge for other young

adults to learn. The documentary recorded the young adults' reflections on their self-guided and motivated learning. This experiment was made possible because educational individuals, such as school board members, principals, teachers, and students were supportive and worked together. Those in educator roles commented on the young adults' work, created supportive environments, and navigated administrative issues.

Eisner made many recommendations directly related to the arts for educators to think about critically. Educators should be authentic in how they present themselves to children in order to further trusting relationships. In essence, educators should practice, or at least have a genuine interest in, what they are teaching. One example might be an educator having confidence in working with an artistic medium, such as watercolour or pastels. This not only helps with the presentation of lessons; it also shows children that the educator cares enough to prepare for the lesson by knowing beforehand what they are doing. Eisner (2002) supports the view that children need to familiarize themselves with a material so that they can focus on their skills in order to feel a sense of mastery (pp. 96-97). In terms of evaluation, educators can carefully listen to children and pay attention to the children's interests, and at the same time pay attention to how the educator's judgements compare with the children's judgements (p. 194). To evaluate children's learning processes and artworks, educators look to artist portfolios where they can see each student's progress over time and their demonstration of technical capabilities (p.92, 183). The use of artist critiques (crits) create opportunities for both children and adults to share constructive feedback to help a child improve their artwork or technical handling of the medium (p. 194). The educator can also regularly re-evaluate learning spaces and make sure that activities incite imagination and meaningful engagement (p. 188).

Art Development for Children Aged 9–12 Years

Eisner (2002), Hume and Palmer (2021), and Lowenfeld and Brittain (1987) categorized children's artistic developments into brief generalizations of what children in each age group may typically experience. Common themes include children searching for their individual identities within a community and relating to their social and environmental surroundings. Some artistic themes overlap such as realism and collaborative art projects. Some of the authors even offer suggestions of tools, methods, and concepts that might interest children to further their social, cognitive, sensory, and creative growth (Burrill, 2005, p. 31). These are general guidelines designed to help educators gain a sense of understanding of children's capabilities and interests in each age group, so that educators are able to create level-appropriate learning opportunities.

Hume and Palmer (2021) provide explanations and suggestions for art educators and artists to encourage cognitive and motor skills, and to explore various artistic materials for children. The authors further categorize children in terms of what artistic skills they should be able to execute and some concepts they may be able to understand. They compartmentalize children aged 9–12 into three groups.

Children aged 9–10 are open to accepting all types of art as they have not yet defined their tastes and what they consider to be good or bad art. They are able to recognize and distinguish different artistic materials, such as watercolour, tempera, and printmaking. They are also open to exploring how artists depict observations in the environment, usually in the natural worlds, such as animals and vegetation. They can begin to understand that artists use art as a tool for cultural and self-expressive means. They are beginning to collaborate with other children and have conversations about art in the community. The authors recommend that children of this age

group explore colour combinations and various textures, and work with materials such as clay (Hume & Palmer, 2021, pp. 14-15).

Children aged 10–11 are more critical about themselves and come with higher expectations of the outcomes of their artwork. They can compare themselves to others and in negative instances may view themselves as not good enough. Children of this age enjoy group projects, coming up with new ideas, and creative problem solving. They are able to compare and contrast art from different contexts and cultures. They are able to connect shapes, symbols, and natural images to create art. The authors suggest looking to materials that children can find in their local environments. Children might be interested exploring dry mediums such as charcoal, pastels, and pencils. Children of this age are encouraged to display their art and to look critically and constructively at artworks, including their own, and at how an artwork can be improved in their opinion (Hume & Palmer, 2021, pp. 16-17).

In the final category, children aged 11–12 are capable of tackling and working with more advanced technical skills using art mediums, such as multi-step or mixed media. They are able to recognize and distinguish some of the elements and principles of art and design and to incorporate these in their artworks. They are open to new and emotional reactions and experiences while exploring artists' ideas and explanations of an artwork. Children in this age category are also becoming more independent and are able to do things on their own without help. Exposure to artists from a diverse set of countries and cultures can be helpful in order for children to begin conversations about the different meanings behind what is beautiful. Educators are encouraged to work with children's interests and curiosities and to encourage the use of their own journals. Children are encouraged to go outside into the community or new spaces for inspiration (Hume & Palmer, 2021, pp. 18-19).

Lowenfeld and Brittain (1987) categorize children between the ages of 9 and 12 years of age with the term “gang age” or the “dawning realism” era. They argue that having a sense of community and viewing themselves as members in society are the most important concepts for children in this age group. Building strong friendships and being members of peer groups with common interests, ideas, and perspectives are also important for children’s social interactions. This may include sharing the same musical tastes or hobbies, and sharing secret codes and languages (p. 306). Social independence is also critical at this age, where children are beginning to be more critical and reflective by asking questions relating to their identities, such as who they are as a person and where they belong in a community (p. 321). They should realize their own power and agency within their social communities or their “gangs” (p. 342). They are also becoming more aware of their social and emotional relationships with the world and of what each individual child may deem real (p. 308).

The authors maintain that children of this age have not yet established full control over their emotions and can experience extreme feelings. Their emotional relationships can also be expressed through symbolic representations, which can be understood with art. Strong feelings in combination with artistic symbolic representations can depict themes surrounding religion, justice in society, and topics of love or hate. The use of colours, for example, can help children express emotions; educators should encourage children to mix paint and use various shades of colours (p. 328). The authors recommend materials such as pencils, crayons, clay, finger paint, paper mâché, and craft materials. Children have an inner desire to be creative and to further their aesthetic growth. Which can include experimenting with materials, exploring feelings, relationships and the environment, and inventing something new. Children will also be attracted to found materials that capture their interest, including natural materials. Lowenfeld and Brittain

(1987) say, “children themselves will collect bark, rocks, pieces of wood, feathers, pieces of old chrome trim from cars or whatever happens to attract them” (p. 339). They recommend that educators keep an eye on the safety of children, so that they do not hurt themselves on broken glass, sharp objects, etc., Educators can support further exploration when they comment on the details of a materials so that it may shed new light and perspective, which children had not thought of before. The authors argue it is the role of the educator to support and scaffold children’s artistic development and not to do the development for them (p. 342).

Eisner (2002) does not have a concrete method of categorizing children into age groups, but he does briefly mention the target group when explaining his modes of treatment. He describes children between the ages of 8 and 12 as liking to create art that most closely resembles the real object or thing they are trying to copy. He refers to the term “mimetic” as forms “that look or sound like what they are intended to represent” (p. 15). He further argues that memesis is not only an artistic representation of the real but can also artistically represent what is felt. Children try to draw their environment as realistically as possible through mimicry (pp. 15-16).

Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences

Howard Gardner is best known for his theory of Multiple Intelligences. Examples include visual-spatial, naturalist and bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, to name a few that stand out and relate most closely to children’s artistic development. Gardner (2011) strongly argues that spatial intelligence, or observing the visual world in a person’s surroundings, is a key component of human development (p. 183). He refers to sensitivity as an element of spatial intelligence, which is most dominantly occupied by artists and people who view art. Sensitivity while observing an artwork can include displaying feelings, searching for a sense of balance and composition, as

well as paying attention to the natural elements (water, fire, minerals, etc.). It can also include paying attention to the how an artwork is displayed and the power and effect it may have on a viewer (p. 185). Gardner argues that there has been little research around the development of spatial intelligence, noting that it may be harder to test for spatial intelligence; in his opinion, children may have fewer skills to expand their spatial intelligences.

Visual-Spatial Art Intelligence

This category of intelligence focuses on sensitivity, as previously discussed. It refers to artistic methods, such as drawing and painting, which rely heavily on visual and spatial words, like thinking in two or three dimensions. Observational skills are enhanced: the viewer can look at and experience everyday objects and begin to rethink things in new contexts and environments based on personal experiences. Sensitivity also helps with the development of fine motor skills or movement, such as refining the senses and exploring the tactile environment (Gardner, 2011, pp. 205-208).

Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence

Gardner defines bodily-kinesthetic intelligence as using the body in different ways to express different goals or to work with objects skillfully in order to improve fine motor movements, such as movements using the fingers, hands, and feet and having good hand-eye coordination. This intelligence also emphasizes muscle movement and memory because kinesthetic intelligence includes the connection of limbs and the nervous system (p. 222). He refers to primate research, showing how primates have the ability to adapt to their environment, and discusses our involvement with the environment with the help of tools and bodies. Gardner further describes mature forms of bodily expressions and how non-verbal cues, such as body movements, also relate to culture; for example, dancers, actors, or inventors are able to transform

objects with the help of the body into something new (p. 235). Gardner further contends that spatial intelligence and fine motor body intelligence are the two strongest intelligences that use tools and objects to further cognitive abilities (p. 245).

Embodied Learning

Embodied learning focuses on the cerebral layers that process information to our motor actions (Gulliksen, 2017, pp. 6-8). It is a relationship between biological constructs, such as the cerebral and the individual. Embodied learning can be further described as the self-development of the brain and hand-eye coordination, but it also refers to social activities. Social activities include feelings and actions typically experienced in relationships such as bonding, communication, and collaborative thinking skills (Gulliksen, 2017, p. 3). There is a misconception that anything cognitive is only a mental activity. So, there is a sense of separation between body and mind (Gulliksen, 2017, p. 7). A key example that enforces a separation between the body and the mind is traditional educational spaces, such as schools, where children are stuck in indoor classroom environments and sit all day in chairs. The education of schooling content focuses on the mind and children's cognitive abilities and not on body–mind interactions explored in children's environments. Rathunde (2009) refers to this as a form of disembodied education and points to a lack of experiential activities (pp. 70-71). However, schools that are inspired to combine both body and mind, such as Reggio Emilia and Waldorf schools, typically follow constructivist approaches, such as a focus on process-orientated or project approaches (Rathunde, 2009, p. 73). Embodied learning is linked to children exploring their bodies and to Gardner's bodily-kinesthetic intelligences. The author argues that children are becoming more disconnected and isolated from nature due to the disconnect of body and mind. Children are stuck indoors and are glued to technological forms of media, such as computers and other smart

devices. There are many benefits to children being in nature, such as play, safe risk-taking, and attention restoration. When one spends time in nature, the mind becomes refreshed and is able to focus and concentrate on educational activities or practice better memory and learning skills (Rathunde, 2009, p. 76). An educational suggestion is to reconnect body and mind relationships by working with nature and natural environments, as is seen in Forest schools (Rathunde, 2009, p.73).

Gulliksen (2017) argues that the brain is capable of receiving inputs from the body as well as mental processes; for example, an individual's thoughts and feelings are filtered in the brain. The brain has a filtration system whereby information is processed so as not to overload the brain with too many sensory inputs. Then, the inputs can be interests, for example, where the brain is willing to let abstract information pass through and register for further processing as cognition output, which results in creating meaning (Gulliksen, 2017, pp. 8-9). When one creates or takes part in an activity such as art, which involves both hand-eye coordination and movement of the body and cognition, it results in multi-modal experiences. This furthers the ability to make meaning (Gulliksen, 2017, p. 10; Rathunde, 2009, p. 71). Rathunde argues that aesthetic experiences are essential to learning processes in embodied perspectives. Aesthetic experiences create opportunities and a sense of awe and inspiration, which allow children to make sense of the world around them to create meaningful explanations and further qualitative processes (Rathunde, 2009, p. 75).

Schools and Pedagogies

Waldorfian Schools

Waldorfian schools are inspired by philosopher Rudolph Steiner, who founded a school for German children who were cigarette factory workers (Nordlund, 2013, p.14). Waldorfian

schools focus on arts-based curricula with a strong focus on the holistic perspective of the whole-being child during their development. Waldorfian schools explore various methods of retaining knowledge, including incorporating Gardner's Multiple Intelligences, such as bodily-kinesthetic, spatial, and musical. Art education professor Carrie Nordlund (2013) describes Waldorfian ways of learning as including the concepts of "head, heart and hand" (p. 15); in other words, they combine emotional and cognitive development in an arts-integrated curriculum. Subjects are taught in sections, where the focus is on one or two subjects studied over the course of a few weeks (Edge Hill Country School, n.d.). The focused subjects are arts-based, such as drama, dance, music, and art; these are used to help explain concepts in math and the sciences through song, dance, plays, or building a sculpture. In essence, Waldorfian educators view children as growing artists and performers in the making. Children are strongly encouraged to play and take risks in order to help them become independent learners and to motivate them to pursue their personal interests. Children are supported to explore with a sense of wonder, creativity, and curiosity by expanding their imaginations, so that they are able to explore their self-awareness through self-reflection and discovery.

Waldorfian schools are an example of a school system that works with an active community collaboration, which emphasizes parents' and community members' involvement with children's education and learning journeys. Parents and friends are encouraged to take part in Waldorfian practices including morning songs and celebrating accomplishments, and to lend a helping hand in community exploration, such as visiting local farms and gardens. A real-world example is the Edge Hill Country School, a Waldorfian-based old stone schoolhouse situated in the countryside surrounded by rolling hills and old maple forests in the county of West Grey, Ontario. It is also one of the very few rural Waldorfian schools outside Toronto, and it follows

the WECAN (Waldorf Early Childhood Association of North America) guidelines. The Edge Hill website includes photos of joyful children holding shovels with potatoes from a garden, children holding up their artistically made mandalas, children baking breaded dragons, and many outdoor activities. Parents help to sing along with the Morning Garden program for the pre-school children (Edge Hill Country School, n.d.).

Forest Schools

Forest schools are the least arts-based example out of all of the schools noted here; however, the main concepts are borrowed from place-based and nature-based theories. One of Forest schools' main philosophies comes from a holistic approach towards viewing a child as a whole learner worthy of love, acceptance, and compassion. The school caters to the well-being of children, such as their emotional needs and development, in order for children to establish relationships between learning, nature, and the community (Cree & Robb, 2021, pp. 11-15). They also emphasize the use of the mind, body, and heart approach (p. 7). The role of the educator is to be a co-learner with the children; educators are instructed to use open-ended pedagogies and curricula and to expect the unexpected, since learning material is also driven by children's present interests. Educators support children by creating spaces for children to grow and explore their strengths and weaknesses (pp. 36-37). Concepts of creativity, discovery, and imagination are prioritized to further children's development. Forest school educators strive to use inquiry, play-based, emergent, and embodied learning as methodologies to empower children and support their identities (childnature.ca). Themes of everyday risk-taking are amplified, where children are free to explore their sensory fields, engage in hands-on learning, and play with materials that spark their interest while in nature (Child and Nature Alliance of Canada, n.d.; Cree & Robb, 2021, p. 10; Jeganathan, 2018). Forest schools provide ample opportunities for

hands-on learning where children explore their sensory information, which includes sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste in environments such as forests, meadows, small bodies of water, and farming communities (Cree & Robb, 2021, p.33).

The popularity of Forest schools grew during the COVID-19 pandemic. These schools were a creative solution for children to still gain valuable learning experiences within a community during a time of social isolation, uncertainty, and disruption of regular education. People meeting outdoors was a loophole to social gatherings during stricter pandemic restrictions and policies. When province-wide schooling and learning spaces were sent to online platforms in the home, many families turned to the outdoors for nature programs. A newspaper article interviewing parents from the Durham region, near Toronto, interviewed parents about their recent experiences with Forest schools. Parents noted that their children's well-being improved, and that they seemed happier and excited to learn new things (Follert, 2022). Forest schools have also been looking to and incorporating indigenous values and perspectives towards relationships with nature (Cree & Robb, 2021, p. 14).

Reggio Emilia Schools

Reggio Emilia was originally a pre-school founded in northern Italy by community members who worked together to build a school from the rubble left by the destruction of the town during the Second World War (Dodd-Nufrio, 2011, p. 235). The term Reggio Emilia is most famous for its relation with *The Hundred Languages of Children*, a poem created by Loris Malaguzzi (Edwards et al., 2012, pp. 3-4). The school was influenced by an Italian early childhood theorist, Susanna Mantovani (Edwards et al., 2012, p. 10), as well as by Dewey's concept of paying attention to the unique experiences of children, and by many other social constructivists in the field (Dodd-Nufrio, 2011, pp. 236-237). Some of the main Reggio Emilia

philosophies and methods include learner-centered, community-based, and arts-based methods by looking to the aesthetic. Listening methodologies are also viewed as important by looking at forms of documentation made by children and together with adults revisiting the work over a period of time, and encouraging children to make meaningful conversations and to express their ideas confidently by making new reflections; children discover more ways to make thinking visible and solve problems (Edwards et al., 2012, p. 11; Fraser, 2012, p. 92). Reggio Emilia is further inspired by holistic philosophies and the concept of individuality, such as focusing on children's positive states of well-being, both physical and mental. Reggio Emilia schools look to the creation of knowledge resulting from interactions between people and their experiences with the environment. They regard community as including a sense of belonging and learning together (Edwards et al, 2012, p. 11). Play is also encouraged for children; even though it is not one of Reggio Emilia's main focuses, play can have an impact on children's social development, developing their skills and creating symbols (with imaginative play) (Fraser, 2012, pp. 96-97; Edwards et al., 2012, pp. 6-7).

The educator's role is to get out of their comfort zone and to move away from traditional teaching, instead embracing a complex child–adult relationship, where children are understood to be in positions of learner and researcher (Dahlberg, 2012, p. 228). New teaching concepts may involve further listening methods (such as being open and sensitive to others), embracing change, and being open to the unknown. True listening is seen as an awareness of recognizing and stopping judgements (Rinaldi, 2012, p. 235). Therefore, it is up to the educator to support children in finding meaning in their actions, surrounding environments, and experiences since children are regarded as "active, competent, and strong, exploring and finding meaning, not as predetermined, fragile, needy and incapable" (Rinaldi, 2012, p. 234). Children are encouraged to

explore their environment and express themselves through multiple languages such as referring to *The Hundred Languages of Children* by focusing on symbolism as a communicative tool.

When educators work on projects with children, it creates creativity where children are able to explore, and learning is transformed into something new (Dahlberg, 2012, pp. 228-229). In order to incite curiosity and creativity for children to explore, the Reggio Emilia methods strongly emphasize the need for educators to create aesthetic awareness. Fraser (2012) emphasizes that "aesthetics is an aspect of relationship that needs to be considered in presenting the materials in the classroom. To foster aesthetic awareness means to help children appreciate the beauty in the world around them, but it also means to heighten their awareness of the links between things in the environment and the emotional response that the objects evoke" (p. 100). Highlighting aesthetically visually and appealing objects found within the local community and outdoor spaces such as the natural world can help children to gain an appreciation of nature and to establish a caring relationship with nature (Fraser, 2012, p. 104).

Montessori Schools

Montessori schools were inspired by Dr. Maria Montessori, who was one of Italy's first women to go to medical university. She became a physician and later an educational activist who worked with children with special learning needs (Association Montessori Internationale, n.d.). There is a misconception that Montessori and Reggio Emilia schools are very similar (Dodd-Nufrio, 2011, p. 235). Montessori schools are primarily child-led, where children are supported to learn and explore their interests at their own time and pace. Educators emphasize each child as an individual and put a lot of trust in the child, so that children are capable to lead and navigate their own ways of knowledge. The idea of self-motivated learning and growing is to support children's relationships between the self and areas of social, emotional, and physical

understandings (American Montessori Society, n.d.). Since the child leads their own learning and every child has unique learning needs, it is recommended that Montessori educators create customized learning programs and curricula, which also creates a sense of diversity among learners. Curricula have a sense of fluidity and flow to them because the end goal is to nurture and cater to the children's desire for learning and knowledge (Leeds Beckett, 2022).

The set-up and planning of Montessori learning spaces stand out. Classrooms combine children of diverse ages who can choose to work independently or collaboratively with one another. The idea that children learn from one another, such as older children teaching and working with the younger children, can help children learn valuable skills such as collaboration, self-confidence, self-motivation, self-directed learning, respect, leadership, and critical thinking skills. Montessori schools also create multi-sensory learning spaces for children to work with materials that help them explore their five senses (American Montessori Society).

Case Study

The following case study is a real-world example of what research can look like when working with children within academic realms. The case study includes participatory methods such as the use of interviews and taking photos to help support children's active roles with a collaboration between adults and children. Since children are defined as vulnerable beings, there will be an emphasis on preparing to work with children in a community on an ethical basis. Educators can consider the following as a guide in the type of document that is deemed essential while preparing and working with children. The case study is an example of how nature and art can be used as tools to collaborate with children and to help dismantle barriers when entering into their worlds and gaining their perspectives. It is also an example for educators of how to be supportive of children's voices during the art-making process from a practical perspective.

Description

The case study project was titled the Nature Art Project and took place as a one-day event in collaboration with the Homer Watson House & Gallery (HWHG) during the March break period. It is important to identify that the child participants already came with a motivation to make art projects, or at least, they arrived with a positive attitude and perspectives towards the arts. A total of six children between the ages of 9 and 12 voluntarily participated in the project after they received adult consent. Two employees from the HWHG as well as an adult volunteer helped with the project. The project took a total of around five hours. Open-ended, semi-structured questions were asked of the children, and their responses were documented with an audio recorder. Children were also encouraged to use a camera and take photos of their work as a visual form of documentation. The aim of the project was to create a space in the community for children to collaborate with one another and for them to share their ideas, thoughts, suggestions, and experiences with art educators while making nature-inspired art works. Another case study goal was to have children explore nature-based and arts-based materials with their bodies within their learning spaces. Children were shown printed photographs of butterflies and reprints of artworks by eco-artist Andy Goldsworthy. Children were encouraged to investigate scaffolding questions inspired by Ritchhart's (2007, p. 147) routine, which includes his See-Think-Wonder (STW) and Connect-Extend-Challenge (CEC) as guiding and supportive investigation questions while looking at artworks (see appendix C). They were asked to look closely at the materials and offer their ideas about what the artwork was made out of, the process of how the artist could have made the work, what the artwork reminds them of, and how they think the artwork can be used. The children also answered questions around themes of education such as topics of learning and teaching. They reflected on their past and current emotional experiences during art-

making spaces. Children explored and experimented with both nature and art materials, which were provided at the site. They also completed a drawing character activity sheet where they drew their imaginary characters and came up with "nicknames" as pseudonyms to represent children's identities for an illustrated book. The illustrated book is planned to be made at a later time and will be designed by the researcher; children's drawings and quotes will be included as a child-friendly version to explain the thesis to children. The illustrated book was conceived in response to an awareness of children's right to receive information concerning them in a child-friendly format which they could understand.

Institution Background

The HWHG is a historical home in which an artist named Homer Watson (1855–1936) and his sister Phoebe Watson (1858–1947) lived. Homer Watson was an Ontario landscape painter who mainly depicted local nature scenes of forests, rivers, streams, fields, and farms near his home which is located close to the Grand River and Doon community in the city of Kitchener in southern Ontario. After the artist's passing, close friends of Phoebe purchased the home and turned it into the Doon School of Fine Arts, where artists such as Frederick Varley from the Group of Seven hosted art and educational events. The school closed in 1966 due to a lack of funding. The HWHG was purchased and preserved by multiple owners, and eventually the city of Kitchener bought the historic building in 1981. The home was transformed into a public arts centre where staff create regular exhibitions, art programs, and other special events for the community. The HWHG is inspired by Watson's artistic legacy and devotion to the natural environment as part of its institutional mission and values.

The case study did not take place in the historical house, but in an old, cozy, yellow brick building on the property, named The Coach House. The name was inspired by the building's

initial and historical use as storage for horse and buggy coaches. The building has since been converted, and the HWHG has transformed it into an educational and studio space where visitors can make creative art projects on the large tables and place their clay and pottery work in the two large kilns in the shared space.

Recruitment

Recruitment posters were created in designer-friendly software, such as Canva. The poster included child-friendly nature illustrations as catchy visuals, a basic description of the project, the amount of allocated time families would need to participate in the project, as well as contact information such as the researcher's email address (see Figure 2). Posters were printed and hung in the community with a QR code for families to easily access the sign-up page on the HWHG website.

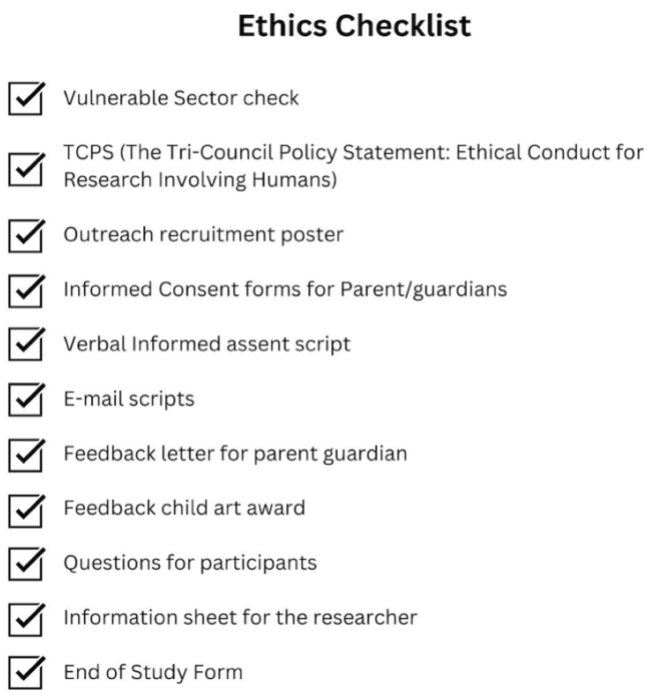
Figure 2

Recruitment Poster Designed in Canva

Ethical Considerations

Preparing to work in collaboration with children within academic realms can be a complicated process, especially since any research with children needs ethical approval. Many forms of documentation were necessary, and these involved a lot of time and preparation before one could even begin the recruitment process. All forms and documentation needed to be approved by a Research Ethics Board (this process took around 6–8 weeks) and additional time (3–4 weeks) to answer any questions from the ethics committee before the Research Ethics Board sent a registered ethics number. Since children are deemed to be vulnerable participants, any research concerning children has to be presented to the entire ethics committee board. Additional time was also allocated each time the project was modified or changed to update and re-submit forms in order to receive ongoing approval from the committee board. Figure 3 shows a checklist and a brief description of some of the types of documentation that were included for the research proposal to be accepted by an ethics committee.

Figure 3
Checklist Used to Organize Documents Needed for Ethics Committee Board Approval



Some of the key documents were as follows:

- *Vulnerable Sector check*. This is a government-issued check, ordered from a local police station. This check is often needed for anyone working with vulnerable populations, such as children.
- *TCPS (Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*. This is a research course on ethics provided by the Government of Canada and the Tri-Council Policy Statement, which was recommended to be completed. One received a certificate of completion.
- *Informed consent forms for parents/guardians*. Parents signed these documents to give permission for their child's voluntary participation. Their purpose was to protect the well-being of children in Canadian contemporary society and to make aware that all participation

was voluntary and needed approved consent from both the child participant and child's caregivers (such as parents).

Included here was a brief description of the researcher conducing the research (artistic background) and a description of the purpose of the study. It was important to include clear and precise information regarding the target participants (children aged 9–12) and to include the important dates, times, materials, locations, and the approximate duration of the time required for participation. A precise explanation was included to reassure participants of the type of data that was collected, such as the audio recordings and photos. Children's personal information, such as name, age, gender, and pseudonyms was also collected. All physical data (e.g., the activity sheets) and digital data (e.g., photos and audio recordings) were saved onto password-protected computers, folders, and external hard drives. Physical data were kept safe under lock and key in a portable strong box. This was to ensure the security of the children's identity and of data collection and storage. All data was planned to be destroyed after three years. It was also important to note that no photos would be taken of the children's faces or anything else that might reveal their identity.

Other sections of the informed consent forms explained the possible benefits of the research. This was done to convince families of the potential positive results of their children's participation. Some examples included supporting children's development of their imaginations, as well as their observational, creative, collaboration, and communication skills in playful and explorative ways. But families also have the right to know of any potential "risks or harms." It was noted that the risks of participation did not exceed risks experienced in everyday life. These include physical risks (fatigue, discomfort, physical contact with others, exposure to natural elements) and psychological risks (emotions of frustration) as part

of the experiences that may occur during the creative making process. It is helpful to make parents aware of the potential risks and harms by including a statement and the listed resources for the Duty to Report as researchers are obligated by the law to report these. A section on the freedom to withdraw re-enforces the voluntary nature of participation; it was made clear that both child participant and parent could withdraw from the study at any given time, and information was provided about what would happen to the data. Participants and an ethics committee needed to know if there would be any compensation for participation; in this case, compensation included peanut-free snacks, fruit juices, vegan fruit gummies, a pencil that looked like a small branch, a sketchbook, and some insect stickers. Children would also receive an illustrated book.

It was also good to inform parents and participants what would be done with the data and research results. Data would be placed in the university library repository, and the results may be included in journal articles, conference presentations, and so on. A polar interrogative question form included "yes" and "no" statements for parents to answer and sign.

- *Verbal informed assent statement script*. This was a script spoken out loud to children in child-friendly language that explained the schedule, project purpose, instructions, and any other information child participants needed to know. Their role as volunteers was reiterated, and they were again informed that they can withdraw at any time.
- *Email scripts.* E-mails were sent to children's parents to keep in touch with any updated information.
- *Feedback letter for parents and guardians.* A letter was sent to parents thanking them for their child's voluntary participation and restating the purpose of the study, the Research

Ethics Board registration number and that they would be contacted by email in the near future with a digital copy of the illustrated book.

- *Art Award for children.* An art award was one way to thank each child participant in a child-friendly way. It was designed in Canva with friendly nature designs, such as animals and some brief text thanking the child for volunteering and making an art project inspired by nature.
- *Questions for participants.* A list was prepared for the ethics review of some guiding questions that would be asked of the child participants.
- *Information sheet for the researcher.* This was an information sheet that was used to keep organized and to keep track of children's data, whether parents had agreed to informed consent, etc.
- *End of study form.* A final form was sent to the ethics committee to notify them of the completed research and that no more data or work with participants was needed.

Materials

Since the case study revolved around the theme of nature and eco-artists, the use of natural materials suited the art project very well. The aim during the collection of materials was to find objects that would encourage children's embodied learning, more specifically, sight, smell, and touch. Therefore, a wide assortment of textures including soft, hard, prickly, etc., were sought. Natural materials from plants and animals were used. This included a wide collection of dried and pressed flowers, leaves, various fluffy grasses, dried moss, sticks, stones, seashells, loofah, pinecones, burlap string, small bird feathers, and large turkey feathers, to name a few. The research took place in winter, and a typical Canadian snowy winter made it difficult to collect materials from the outdoors. The majority of the materials were purchased online or were

found at local craft stores. An earlier attempt had been made during the previous summer and fall seasons, when flowers, leaves, and different assortments of grasses were collected and pressed flat between heavy books to dry. However, over time the organic materials lost pigment and became multiple shades of browns; they became less appealing to children, who might prefer to work with brighter colours.

Art materials were also provided; these included paper of various sizes and colours, tracing paper, pencils, coloured pencil crayons, wax-based crayons, scissors, glue, tape, and tweezers to use as a tool to pick up the dried flowers. Children used a pencil that looked like a short, thick tree branch, where the bark was left on and a piece of graphite was placed in the middle for children to enjoy the tactile touch of a rustic wood texture while drawing. A few of the art materials, such as paper, were purchased, but the majority of the art materials, such as the drawing materials, came from the researcher's personal collection. All materials were set up on a table and placed in trays for easy access for the children to use and make their choices from an array of the diverse materials that peaked their interests. Some items that were kept in bags such as moss, the children were reluctant to open on their own. During the planning stages with the HWHG, there was a discussion regarding art materials; even though the project required natural materials, it was reassuring to know that the gallery offered the option of using their materials.

Digital tools, such as a camera and an audio recorder, were also used to record the children's discussions and to take photos as a form of documentation of their brainstorming ideas and final art projects.

Data

Children's Voices

The following are some excerpts from the interviews. These have been categorized into different sections, such as educational-based, arts-based, and child-led questions. Child participants also came up with a few investigations and questions of their own, which shows their agency in the form of active engagement and curiosity about the thesis process as examples of child-led investigations. In order to protect children's identities, and as agreed according to the ethics process on the consent forms, children will not be identified by their real names. Instead, children are represented as CP (child participant). The researcher is labelled R, the volunteer art assistant as AA, and the art education staff member from the HWHG as AE. There is a possibility of inaccuracy when many participants were speaking at once and/or when children did not speak loud enough or their voices were unclear on the audio recordings.

Education-Based Questions

R: What do you think it means to be a good teacher?
CP: You have to make sure that your students understand what you are trying to teach them.
R: When you think about a good teacher, is there any teacher that stands out?
CP: You need to really teach people what you are trying to tell them in a way that they can understand and that everybody can participate in it.
R: Yeah, that is a good answer.
CP: You need to adapt to your students.

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R: What do you like best when a teacher tries to teach you something new? If there is something new you have never heard of before, no idea, and a teacher comes with that information, how would you like them to teach it to you?
CP: In like a way that is fun. My teacher is always making it really fun when she teaches us something new.

R: Are there some examples?

CP: When we doing fractions a lot and I kind of already knew what fractions already were, we were kind of doing fractions, she made like a game. Where we could play to like fractions.

R: Everybody was doing a game together?

CP: Yeah, well not all together but, like, we had partners and we did groups and we would do a game.

R: Wow, that sounds like a pretty cool teacher. Anybody else?

CP: I like it to relate to stuff that I already know.

***

R: Do you know what the word research means?

CP: Researching a subject is when you like you try to look for intel on something that you try to learn about something.

AE: You guys can provide an example because you guys did some research on something this week.

R: Did you guys do a research project?

CP: [child's name] looked it up on her phone.

CP: We wanted to find out what the Q-tips meant, the Q in Q-tips

CP: Quality tips!

R: I didn't know that

AE: You guys did research on that, right?

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R: What does a researcher do? Any ideas?

CP: They have to try to figure out something like Q-tips meant. They try to find something maybe that are published on the topic and the… if it is not fully there, they can do more of a thing they don't know. They can see what is there and then kind of figure out some things.

R: Yeah.

AE: Do you guys remember what I said about some websites?

CP: Some websites anybody can post, but then some websites, like science websites they are reserved to scientists. Don't go on a random website which you found.

CP: Like a random website.

CP: Wikipedia.

AE: What's one that anyone can post?

CP: They can also say things like drinking water is unhealthy.

R: Yeah.

CP: Or they can say something like milk is unhealthy.

CP: Or that candy is healthy [laughs].

CP: Candy is healthy [others laugh].

***

R: What role do you think I play? Am I a researcher, am I a teacher, am I a student?

CP: Based on what I have read from the paper, I think you are a student and that you are applying for a Master's degree.

R: Yeah, you did your background research.

CP: And you are working on your thesis.

AE: [2 children's names] actually read the contract all the way through before I gave it to their parents.

CP: Twice.

CP: The role you play is technically a mix of all of those. You are a teacher slash researcher slash student because you are a student. You are a student on the way to a teacher who researches things and if there are connections.

CP: Right now you are teaching us stuff but also you are researching for your thesis, but you are also a student because you are learning stuff.

R: Who am I learning from today?

CP: [laughs]

R: I am learning from all of you today.

R: So, are you the role of the teacher today? What you are telling me and teaching me things?

CP: Yeah, yeah.

R: How does that feel?

CP: I want to point our teachers let us, our teachers were the students and we were the teachers, it was fun.

Arts-based questions

R: How did you guys feel about doing this project? While making things?
CP: Relaxed. It was really fun to design things like this of just pure nature.

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R: If you had a friend who wanted to do an art project like this in the future, how would you teach it to them?
CP: I have no idea

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R: Would you do a project like this for an art project in school?
CP: For an art project, yeah, definitely, that would be really good for school.
R: Do you think other kids would enjoy it?
CP: Hmm, yeah.

***

R: Can you describe what it is like to belong in a group or work together?
CP: What it is like?
CP: Yeah, what it is like. What does it feel like to work together?
CP: It feels good when you are in a group.
CP: It feels nice and kind of sometimes complicated.
CP: Teamwork is fun, like working as a team.
R: Complicated? What is complicated about it?
CP: It's kind of complicated finding what does what and working.
CP: Getting everybody to cooperate.
CP: It is also hard sometimes; it is small that you both can't work on it and finding a good way to work on a thing at a time.
CP: For me it is mostly cooperation.
AA: Isn't it when you put your ideas together something really amazing can come out.
CP: What is really annoying you do most of the work and then it ends up in the garbage, it happens at school.

***

R: How did you feel during this project, making it?

CP: It was fun, we got help. The flowers were kind of hard to place like these tiny little ones. You can't really tell that they are there, but they are there.

R: Yeah, I see them, oh that one, yeah, that one is really tiny.

CP: That one [points to a tiny flower].

R: That one I cannot see so much, very tiny.

R: Is there anything else you disliked or liked about the project?

CP: I liked everything. I disliked that we don't have enough orange

R: Orange flowers, right?

***

R: If you were to do the project again, would there be anything you would do differently?

CP: Yeah.

CP: I think trying to maybe have different flowers in different sizes and different types.

CP: More variation.

CP: More variations, because we a lot of one type, a flower painted different colours.

***

R: If somebody came along and said that's so cool, can you teach me how to do that?

CP: I would try to teach them so they can understand easily or like I don't know.

CP: Like a step by step, or make it easier so they can understand better, even with the teaching part.

Child-led investigations and questions

R: Do you guys mind if I ask just a few last couple of questions?

CP: Yeah, that's fine.

R: Is that ok?

CP: Yup.

CP: Get your recording thing ready.

R: Yes, you are right, thank you for the reminder, I appreciate it.

***

CP: What is this thing about?

R: My work?

CP: Yeah, your work

R: I just basically want to find out how adults can listen to children's voices. That's my thesis, that is my main point.

CP: But how does it relate nature though?

R: Nature--

CP: It's just the topic.

R: It's the topic and art is used as the tool. Art is the tool that I am using to be able to see how we adults can have conversations with kids.

CP: Oh.

R: It is more like kind of theoretical, a little more abstract, it is not so concrete where I am going to say, I am going do something and I expect this to happen and kids are supposed to say this exact thing. I am just saying I am going to let you guys do whatever you want, let you guys take the lead and see where it goes. It is more about what your guys' interests are and my hopes is that people in education, maybe in schools, can pay more attention to what you guys have to say for learning, how you like to learn. How do you like people to be a good teacher. Those kinds of things.

CP: There are some schools that do that. I go to one of those.

R: You go to one of those? There are many different types of schools.

CP: What are they called, the direct learning schools like Waldorf schools.

CP: Montessori.

R: Yes, exactly, like Montessori is a perfect example; they do something like child-led learning where they cater to you guys and what you have to say and what you guys want to learn, right. They want to pay attention to your interests. I am taking that too; I am borrowing those kinds of ideas. I am interested in what everybody has to say.

CP: Are you planning to become a teacher?

R: Yeah, something like that.

CP: You should really add that in. You can really add that conversation into your thesis thingy.

R: Which one, which question?

CP: Whatever we just said.

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R: What will the book look like? I still have to think about it. I think I am going to include some of your sketches, include pictures of your projects.
CP: How long until we get it?
R: How long? I am going to need some time. I want to make it good and make it look nice. So, it may take me a couple of weeks. I am going to work on my paper first and then I can work on the booklet then send it to your parent's email.
CP: It is the thesis.
CP: Wait, wait are you actually going to publish this?
R: Yes, it will be
CP: What?
CP: So you can buy it?
CP: Are we going to have our names?
R: I can't for legal reasons. I would have to ask for more permissions to include your names. But I can publish your nicknames, which can be used.

***

CP: We are sort of writing it for you, like giving you what we are essentially like saying.
R: Yeah, you are right.
CP: You are paying us in snacks.
R: Yeah, snacks and in art materials.
CP: But mostly snacks.
CP: You are paying us in art materials and whatever these things are.
R: You are right, snacks, art materials, and nature things.
CP: Did you even buy these things? You bought the nature pom-poms?
R: Yeah, I bought the nature pom-poms.

Children's Visual Data

Children were invited to use a digital camera to take photos of their ideas, artworks and anything else that they deemed to be of importance. The following figures are some examples of photos taken by children.

Figure 4

Child Participant's Photo of Collaborative Ideas in Sketchbook at Beginning of Project

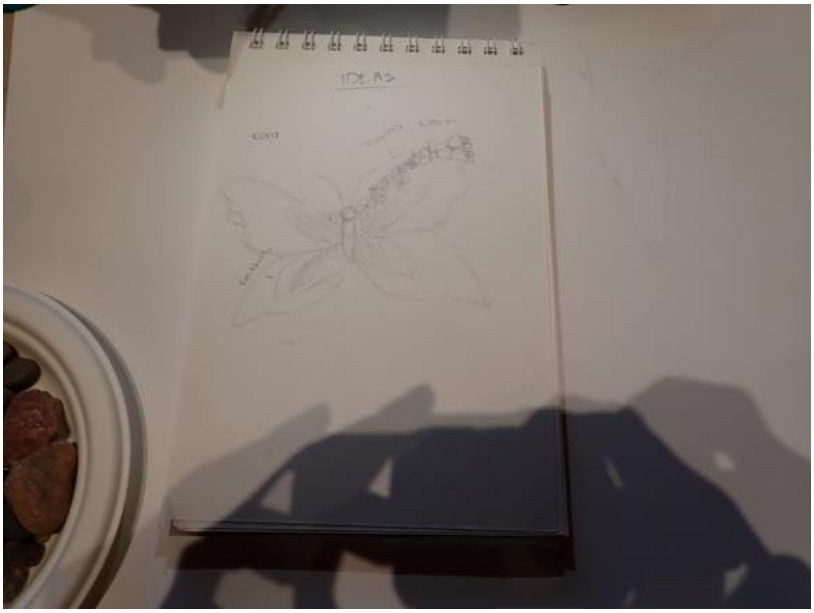


Figure 5

Child Participant's Photo of Adult Helping to Cut out Butterfly Shape

Figure 6

Child Participant's Photo of Landscape where the Butterfly Shape Will Be Glued

Figure 7

Child Participant's Photo of Loofah, Used Later to Play Catch

Interviews

Interviews, as part of a helpful qualitative participatory research method, can also apply to working with children in order to support children's voices by listening carefully to their responses and paying close attention to their words and body language. Flewitt (2014) notes a few reasons why interviews are an important research method. Interviews are good for gaining insights to a participant for the researcher; they help to create a sense of understanding of people within their contexts in terms of their opinions and feelings; they can also help gain insights into other people's perceptions and why they act or say things the way they do (Flewitt, 2014, p. 138). Tools such as audio recorders can be helpful in data collection to retrieve children's responses as direct quotes. The audio recordings needed to be transcribed and checked, and around three to four hours of audio took around 12 to 15 hours to transcribe; this aligns with Flewitt's suggestion that one hour of audio can take roughly four hours to transcribe (2014, p. 149).

Semi-structured questions were prepared beforehand with a prepared schedule; some questions were later spontaneously modified, or new questions were added while working with the children. This meant there was a sense of flexibility by adjusting the questions, being attentive to children's responses, and creating relaxed spaces (Flewitt, 2014, p. 140). The case study project was originally planned for three hours, but it was extended after the child participants requested more time to work on their projects. Flexibility in extending the time of the case study allowed for more insightful discussions. Not all questions were answered, as children responded to some questions by saying, "I don't know"; they changed the subject or responded with silence. Flewitt recommends treasuring the moments of silence and even describes three types of silence to pay attention to: "silence to think; silence to refuse and

answer; silence that reflects the fact that an interview is not going well. Interviewers also need to pay close attention to participant's body language to gauge when it might be appropriate to prompt or not" (2014, p. 148).

Flewitt also argues it is best to interview children while they are working on an activity (2014, p. 144). There was a noted difference when the child participants were answering questions at the very beginning of the case study, where the space was set up in a traditional educational format with children sitting at the tables and raising their hands to answer questions. However, once they were working on their nature-inspired art projects and moving around the room to collect more materials while they were answering questions, the child participants seemed more engaged and open to sharing more of their past experiences and reflections. The interview began to more closely resemble a natural discussion, where there was a sense of comfort for both the child participant and the researcher. The children felt further compelled to ask the researcher many questions, especially about the case study, with themes such as the recording process, the thesis topic, and their suggestions as to what conversations to include in the thesis. They also felt in control and bold enough to offer their critique toward the researcher as to why someone in their rightful mind would purchase nature materials and not go into the backyard to dig up rocks. At this stage, children did not feel the need to raise their hand and wait to be chosen by the researcher to answer, but instead, spoke when they wanted to offer their deep insights with adults in the space. What felt like at first, a sense of power imbalances became more levelled between the adults and children, answering and asking the questions while children were making art.

Tools for Research Data and Dissemination

Computer-Based Programs

Several online programs and app-based platforms were extremely useful tools for the disseminating and organizing of data and research information; these became helpful while revising and finalizing research information during the thesis-writing process.

Design-based and arts-based platforms such as Canva, Procreate, Microsoft Presentations and QR Codes were user-friendly programs and valuable tools for designing recruitment posters, art programming presentations, award sheets, checklists, and activity sheets. Arts-based educators are not required to have a degree in design, and although it may be helpful to approach arts-based projects with some designer skills, these programs offer a vast array of features and templates to choose from. In the online program Canva, for example, many of the templates were customized, such as changing font, colour, and style. Personal photos and files were easily imported, which is how the recruitment poster was created. The Procreate app or any platform resembled traditional handwritten notes, drawing or painting methods on touch-screen platforms such as iPads. All character designs for the character activity sheet and other brainstorming diagrams and sketches were designed in Procreate. A QR code was used with the Homer Watson House & Art Gallery recruitment poster for people who are on the go and use their smartphone cameras to scan and be redirected to the gallery's website and then to the sign-up page in order to participate in the case study. These platforms brought a sense of relief from stress and saved time.

Community-based apps were most helpful when reaching out to a target geographical area such as a suburban community, or reaching out to neighbouring communities. An app called Nextdoor was used during the recruitment phase where locals offered suggestions in the comment sections about a few institutions which may take an interest in the case study.

Mind Maps

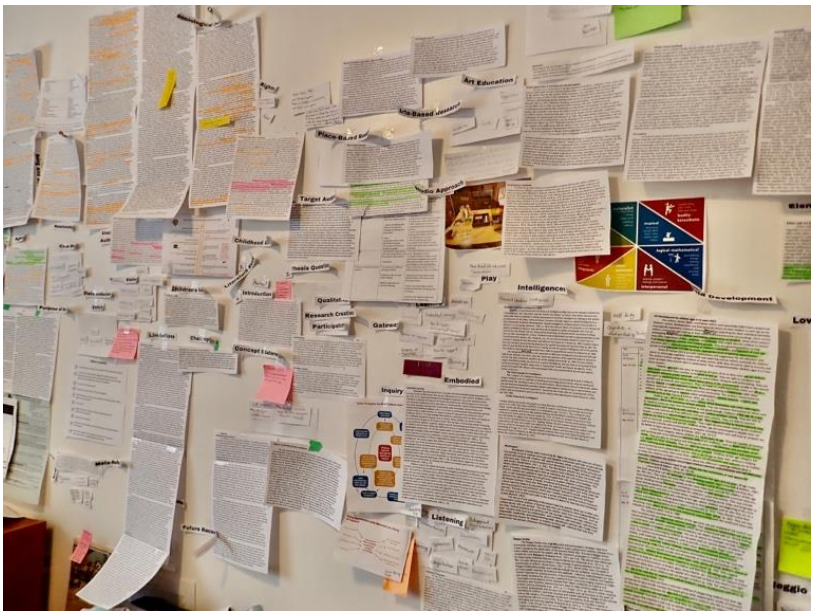
Mind maps were the most useful tool to organize information such as research materials and proved to be an extremely helpful method to organize one's thoughts and arguments while structuring the thesis. It is a process of constant revising, restructuring, and finalizing information. Maps transform information into simpler and generalized compartmentalization of information in a visual way. An analogy to explain this simplification of information would be that a mind map is similar to peeking into a window rather than opening the whole door and walking in. Research, data and all information was divided into themes (agency, community, relationships, learning and voices) and categories relating to the thesis formatting (research question, literature review, research methods, case study, ethics, etc.,)

Eisner (2002) argues that mind maps are an extremely helpful and visual tool for cognitive functions. He strongly believes that drawing up mind maps helps us to make connections to different points of information such as relationships and concept connections. As Eisner explains, "We use maps because they display, by a structural analogue, relationships in space that provide a useful image of the world we wish to navigate. Maps lay it out for us" (2002 p. 11). Mind maps are a helpful method that provides a near-complete view of most information at any given time and place. Both physical and digital mind maps were created to structure the thesis paper. The physical mind map was a wall where a collection of text, images, sticky notes, sketches, diagrams, charts, and photocopies from books were taped together (see Figure 8). Once the main keywords and headings were established, all research information and data were categorially reorganized over time by the most relevant heading, and some information was taken down entirely as it lost its relevancy towards the end. A numbering system was found to be

essential, where numbers were placed on the headlines in order to help figure out the structure of the thesis paper.

Figure 8

Mind Map on Wall



Digital mind maps were also created as twins to the physical mind maps. Two different styles and types of digital mind maps were used. The desktop mind map was a collection of computer folders with the headings and titles borrowed from the wall map. Each folder contained various files and documents, such as journal articles, website links, summaries, photos, and notes that included supporting quotes from researchers. The folder was arranged to match the wall arrangement as closely as possible (see Figure 9). The second digital mind map looked more like a traditional mind map with text in boxes and lines branching out in different directions. This mind map was made possible in the MindNode app, which could be saved in the iCloud and shared to multiple devices for editing. Other programs similar to MindNode are available online or through app platforms. The MindNode map was the most helpful in the final writing process of the thesis because the program allowed for flexibility. The editing application, such as adding

boxes, text, and lines, was user-friendly, which made re-organizing information very easy and time-effective. In contrast, the physical mind map where information had to be printed, cut out, and carefully retaped involved more time. In MindNode, the option to customize or change line and text colour was also a useful option to colour code different themes, such as black lines for direct quotes or purple lines for recurring ideas and themes such as play. Although this mind map would be difficult to print on 8.5 × 11inch paper because it became too large, it is reassuring that the platform allows for very large files. One of the most helpful options was that online links could be hyperlinked into the map for easy access to any video-based interviews or other websites to help keep track of sources. Other visual-based additions were also used, such as emojis, stickers, and images; these could be imported into the map to use as a sort of symbolic code system.

Figure 9

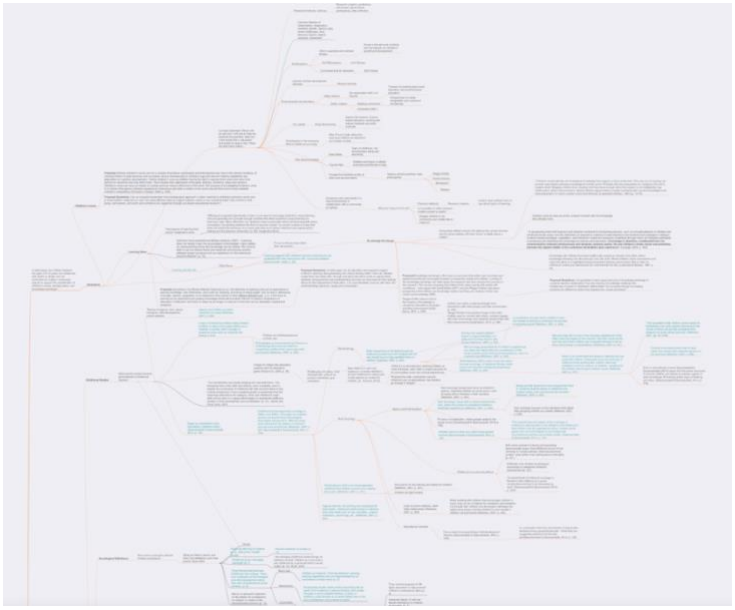
Digital Mind Map on Desktop

Figure 10

Digital Mind Map in MindNode

Figure 11

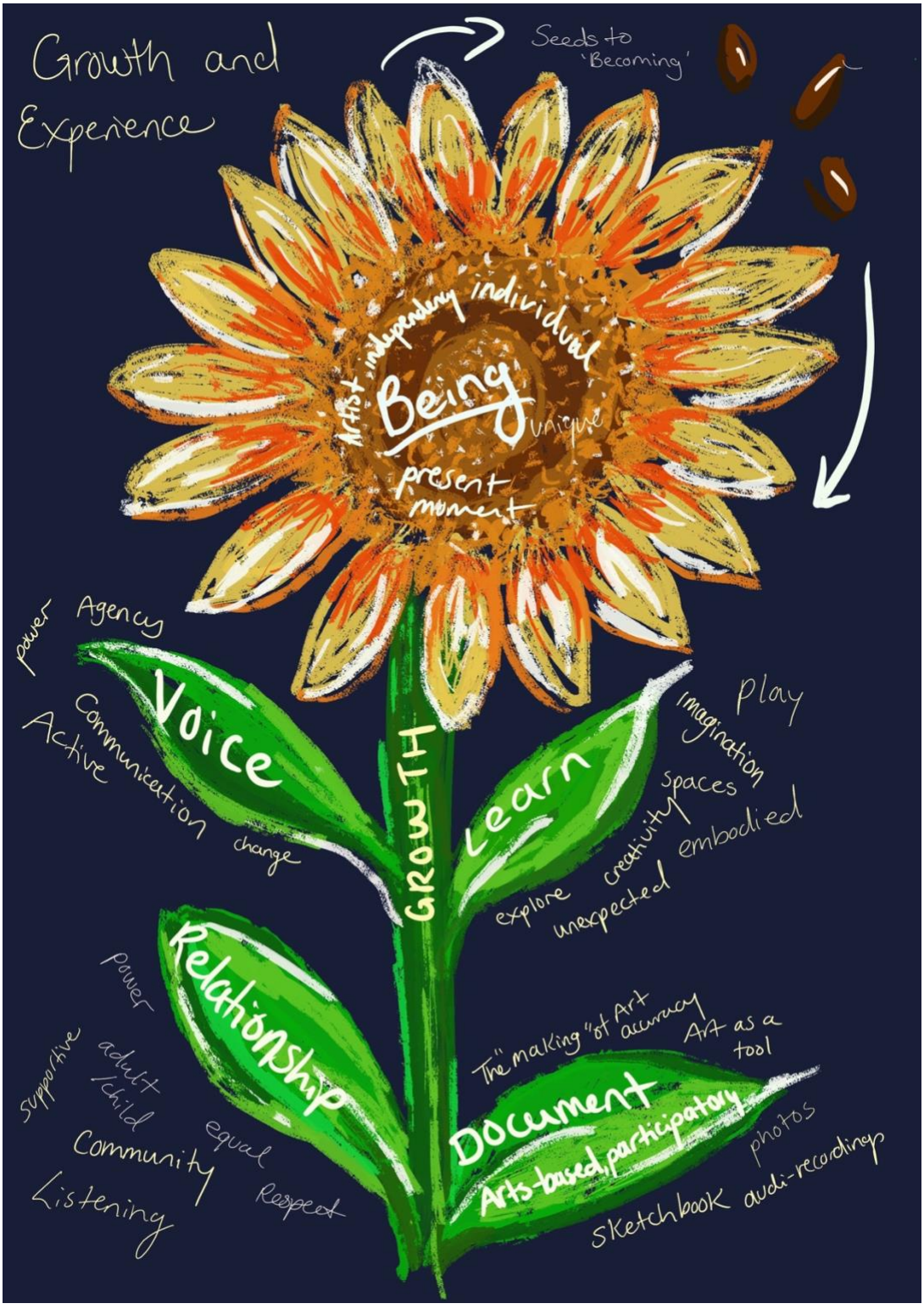
Digital Mind Map on MindNode close-up



Blooming Growth

Figure 12 is a metaphorical model explaining the growth and experience with themes discussed earlier in the thesis for children to reach a stage of a blooming moment. The sunflower represents each experience that a child has and it exists in the present moment, which includes the "being" child. Different themes and topics are visible on the leaves. Each leaf represents a factor that contributes to the growth and health of the flower. The leaves can be tools or theories that can be utilized and put into action by adults in order to bring on children's experiences. All of the leaves have to be considered in order to have a healthy plant. When the sunflower has fully bloomed it represents the full experience. Then the flower drops the seeds. The seeds are what each child takes away from that experience/moment. The seeds represent the "becoming" child in which both present moments and future moments are contained. The cycle for new experiences to happen starts all over again.

Figure 12
A Metaphorical Model of Growth and Experience Cycle



Reflections and Observations

Arts-Based Learning

As was previously suggested by Eisner (2002), it is recommended that educators present themselves authentically to children by being genuinely interested with the topics they are teaching and by having confidence in working with the materials being taught. Drawing materials were the only artist materials in the nature art project. Drawing materials such as pencil crayons, wax crayons, and oil pastels could be easily used by the children and they were materials that the researcher was also confident and comfortable teaching with. Nature materials were chosen as a result of the researcher's personal interest and experiences working with nature-based materials for artist-based practices, which would be able to help children by making sure they had the right tools and techniques. Nature-based materials were also chosen to follow for guidance after Hume and Palmer's (2021) previous suggestion for children's development to work and connect with objects that can be found in their local environments. However, given the winter season with unpredictably rainy and snowy weather, it was difficult to find nature materials; nothing was blooming or in season. Nature materials were purchased online or in local craft stores for children, so they could still explore and be fascinated by the natural environment. It was also noted by Eisner (2002) that children should stick to working with only one material to hyper-focus on. Although the children did mainly work with the nature-based materials and a few drawing materials, they requested more materials, such as paint. So, some children may have wanted to explore with more than one or two materials at the same time to expand to a mixed media approach to accomplish their creative goals.

Children were practicing Gardner's theory of visual-spatial intelligence by working with multiple artistic methods such as drawing in a character activity sheet or drawing in their

sketchbooks. Although it was requested that the children use their sketchbooks to draw out their plans and ideas as a form of brainstorming and planning before creating their art projects, the children who worked more on a solo basis skipped this process and jumped right into the project; they created what they had imagined in their minds right away. The child participants who did complete sketches and wrote down ideas were those who worked in groups or pairs, where more planning and collaboration was involved. Children were also exploring two- and three-dimensional work; many of them created three-dimensional sculptures or a mix of both. One child participant made a bird out of pressed flowers and glued everything onto a sheet of paper, so everything was relatively flat; however, the child chose to include a seashell with small pieces of grain glued inside the shell and make it stick out from the paper in the third dimension to make it look as if the bird would eat from the bowl.

Children's observational and creative skills were enhanced when they used natural found objects, such as pinecones or seashells, and with the help of their imaginations came up with new contexts for an object; they were thus transformed into an artistic exploration. Examples occurred when a child participant used a seashell as an eye for an owl or two sponges glued together to create a top hat for a cat sculpture. All of the children were skillfully working with the materials and tools, cutting, placing, arranging, and gluing them to improve their fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination while creating an art project to further their cognitive skills. When they were asked specifically about the emotions that they experienced during the project, they expressed that they felt relaxed and had fun during the art-making process, and that it was an activity they would do again with new ideas.

Eisner's (2002) concept of mimicry, as well as Lowenfeld and Brittain's (1987) theory of the "drawing realism" era in childhood development was proven during the case study. After

completing their nature art project, one child participant wanted to create a more traditional artwork by desiring to draw a realistic portrait of a cat. He requested that the researcher help them in acquiring the technical skills and recognizing the proper proportions. He was shown a step-by-step guide and focus was put on the oval and round shapes. He then had the desire to draw a realistic drawing of the cat with these skills and techniques, but eventually became frustrated. The frustration came from the child himself, he thought that he was not able to fulfill his own expectations and it resulted in a negative expression of emotions. By focusing on the holistic aspects and encouraged by the Waldorfian, Forest, Reggio Emilia and Montessori "head, heart and hand" concept and the well-being of the child during their learning processes**,** compassion and patience was shown to him as well as a sense of understanding that he could not complete what he had imagined in his mind. It is important to explain to the child the reality of the situation, that it would take time and lots of practice to perfect the skill. Indeed, he soon acknowledged his limitations, that it was the best he could do at the present moment. He recognized his strength**s** and weaknesses: He was capable of following the proportions and create shapes, but the finished drawing did not feel right for him. He was encouraged to take a break and move around. So, he continued to play with some nature materials and transitioned into to a happier state of well-being. Since children do have a tendency and drive to "drawing realism" it is important to note that children set themselves against their own expectations which can create negative experiences. The researcher can be attentive to these difficult moments for the child.

Children's Curricular Suggestions

Children often shared their insights and past learning experiences when they were asked questions related to education. They were asked these questions, inspired by Dewey to find out what stood out from children's past learning experiences. When researchers and educators are

familiar with the experiences that left a positive impact, incentives can be created to create more worth-while and quality experiences in education. Children reflected that the role of the educator is to be supportive and adapt to their needs in order to make sure that children can understand the information given to them. They noted that if they were to teach the project to another friend, they would try to teach them so the instructions could be easily understood, using, for example, a step-by-step guide. Other suggestions included making the learning material relate back to their past experiences or to things that they already knew. One child participant was very excited to answer that they enjoyed learning things in a fun way and provided an example where math (specifically, fractions) was taught in the form of a game with others. Learning new educational material through a game is another example of making learning material engaging through play. A more critical-based conversation was brought up, with a discussion of where children looked up information, such as the internet and reliable sources.

Children were asked for their opinion on what role the adult plays, and if the researcher was a student, teacher, or researcher; the goal was to find out how they would define a researcher who was interested in working with children. Children noted that the researcher took on all three roles. They responded enthusiastically by trying to figure out the role and further expanded upon why the researcher played all three roles. They came to the conclusion that while being a student in a university, the researcher was also a teacher, teaching the child participants about nature and eco-art. The researcher was also working on a thesis and leading the project. The question was presented to children to criticize and reflect on positions of the learner and researcher as is practiced in Reggio Emilia inspired learning environments.

When the children were asked if they would do anything differently if they were to do the project again, many responded with satisfaction that they really enjoyed the nature art project; it was the perfect activity to do. Other ideas could be to make different artworks, such as an animal or different arrangement of materials, and maybe include other materials such as paint. They also requested more variation in the materials provided, such as a more diverse range of plants and flowers to use with different sizes, and more colours since there were not enough orange flowers. They would agree to create a similar project for art in school environments.

Play

The action of play emphasized concepts burrowed from Nature-based methods and Forest school pedagogies by developing personal and meaningful relationships with nature and exploring sensory experiences. Children would explore hands on learning with nature materials during their art-making projects and after the projects were completed. A simple object was transformed by their imagination and turned into an object to be played with; the object became a new source of fun. Two instances were noted. Oblong-shaped seashells were turned into imaginary firearms by one child participant, who went around the room making “pew pew” sound effects to further his imaginative world. The loofah was another object that was transformed by all of the child participants together to use as something to play catch with; they threw the loofah into the air. Another observed moment that stood out was during clean-up time: two child participants discovered that the fluffiness of the pampas grasses could be easily transformed into a sweeping brush in order to clean everything off the table into the garbage. One child participant created their art project to be something to be played with. They created a boat and were experimenting with different materials that would best represent a sail and the harpoons of their boat. Play is something for children and creates positive experiences because

play helps children establish relationships between arts, nature and community and further holistic methods of using mind, body and heart while furthering their imaginations.

Agency

At the beginning stages of the project, a few house rules were stressed as guidance to maintain respectful working spaces. Children were asked to be respectful towards one another, to share materials, to listen while somebody else was speaking, and to offer constructive criticism by adding positive suggestions if they did not like somebody else's ideas. The roles also applied to the adults in order to further trusting and respectful relationships.

Agency was practiced by allowing the children to lead and direct with their art project ideas. They were able to further their individual and independent artistic journeys by exploring their artistic freedom without any predetermined answers. Scaffolding approaches as recommended by Eisner and in arts-based methods were used to help with the types of questions children were asked, and to support them in investigating materials and coming up with their creative art projects. Consent was regularly requested by asking the child participants if it was all right to ask more questions, and the interview continued when they said yes.

Listening methods as suggested by Clark and her Mosaic approach, the Reggio Emilia methodologies and PAR methods put emphasis on sharing narratives. An eco-art presentation was shown to the children by viewing Andy Goldsworthy's artworks after questions around learning, teaching and education to give them a break from the interview and to inspire them for their own art by observing artworks. Printed copies of his artwork were distributed. It was Goldsworthy's work of coloured leaves arranged in a circle with a black hole in the center that was shown to children. The reason why his particular artwork was chosen was due to the narrative behind the making of it which would appeal to children. A dramatic pause was

emphasized before the climax of the story was revealed when the dog ran into the artwork, moments before the artist completed the artwork and was to start all over. This story captured children's attention and emphasized the dramatic background behind making a piece of art. The narrative was used as a sort of an ice breaker to help make children comfortable and to encourage them to share their own narratives behind an artwork. Which was proven to have worked as a child expressed their personal stories and other past experiences such as the making of a snowman with a sibling**,** and pointed out dramatic events during process.

Moments of silence were also respected, such as when children responded by saying nothing or simply answering with "I don't know"; this was seen as an indication to move on to another question or to stop asking questions altogether. It was also helpful during these moments to look to children's body language to determine whether they felt uncomfortable or looked overwhelmed or bored with the questions. Children also responded by changing the subject or by continuing to play with a material as an indication to move on or to stop questions all together.

When it was communicated to the children that they could create whatever they wanted, there was a fear at first that this would be too vague and too open-ended for them. A back-up plan was in place to introduce further topics, such as animals or characters, if children felt that there was no direction or inspiration. However, all participants very quickly came up with their ideas and were ready to jump right into the making of their projects. All the child participants were autonomous and were excited to get come up with ideas and use their imagination right away, and they explored the materials with little adult input. Children did ask for adult support in helping them work with some of the tools, such as the hot glue gun. In this case, children could lead the way by pointing to the exact position where they wanted their objects glued down; the children's decision making was thus respected. When the children looked stuck, or if they were

trying to figure out what materials to use or to come up with other ideas for sections of their artworks, adults asked them if they would like suggestions. Help was offered by asking more questions to the children, such as if they would like to work with different materials, to encourage more exploration of materials. In these cases, the adults were the helpers and the children were the directors. Children were also shown trust from the adults with their own decision making if they were confident enough to work with the hot glue guns. One child wanted to work with the glue gun at the very start, and they were asked if they felt comfortable and confident to work with one independently. They replied that they were, and after keeping a close eye for the first few moments, the adults determined that they were capable of operating it on their own.

The illustrated book was conceived in response to the UN rights, more specifically, Article 13 with respect to children receiving information. The purpose of the illustrated book was to further PAR methods by sharing the research results with the child participants and the community. The collected data (photos, drawings, nicknames, and quotes) would be distributed to the parents' emails. This was planned so that children can have access to the data after the research and data had been organized and compiled into a format that was easily accessible and readable for the children. Children have the agency to revisit the data and research results and further talk about their experiences or reflections to their parents while viewing the illustrated booklet together. As a result, parents might be surprised by the positive art experiences and may be inclined to foster children's learner-centered artistic events. It can persuade other families to join and spread social awareness of child-led pedagogies and agency. Which can then lead to societies being genuinely interested in how to exhibit PAR data results in open community spaces.

It is also recognized that academic papers are not accessible to children or many families due to the barriers of theoretical language and the need of assistance to read and comprehend the thesis. By disseminating the research results through a child adequate medium such as the illustrated book supports children's agency and makes their voices being heard by a wider audience such as other adults, families, and other children so individuals can understand and can have access to children's voices.

Embodied Learning

It was observed that the children explored the diverse number of textures offered through the nature-based materials. Some examples included pine cones for hard textures, fluffy grasses for soft textures, loofah and sponges for springy textures, and wheat stalks for prickly textures. Children actively went back and forth between their work tables and the materials table to continue their explorations of materials. All of the children liked to play with the different textures and seemed to enjoy picking up materials with their hands or using tools such as tweezers to pick up the delicate pressed flowers. One child participant was fascinated by the fluffy grass and enjoyed its softness; they would fiddle with it in their hands and used it to tickle their own arms. Children were practicing Gardner's theory of intelligences of bodily-kinesthetic intelligence by working skillfully with the materials and tools, such as cutting, placing, arranging, and gluing the materials to improve their fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination, while creating an art project to further their cognitive skills.

Children were also "busy bodies" similar to how children explore their sensory information in Forest Schools such as touch, sight and sound by feeling materials with their hands but also smelling the various dried plants. Children not only used their hands and fingers but their entire bodies by working while sitting on the stools or standing up and switching

between the two locations on a regular basis. They were also running back and forth between two buildings towards the last hour of the case study; by this time, many of them had completed their art projects and wanted to go to the other building to complete some of their other art projects from the March break camp, or simply hang out between the two spaces.

Community

Although the preference was that children worked in groups or in pairs, many decided to work on their projects on their own or collaborated with an adult rather than another child. The idea to have children collaborate together was inspired by Montessori child-led concepts where children learn from one another. This concept was evident during the case study when the older children collaborated and taught one of the younger children. These two participants offered valuable insights such as their pros and cons while working in groups. The child participants noted that teamwork can be fun; however, it can also be a complicated process where each party member had to agree and figure out their roles during the collaboration. One child participant also noted their frustrations with a facial expression of sadness and disappointment when they mentioned that their finished collaborative projects were thrown into the garbage in school environments. The child participants also came to an agreement on their own about who was going to take the finished art project home. There was a discussion between them about cutting the finished project in half so each could take half home with them, but they decided against cutting the work up. They agreed that one of them would take it home, and the other took photos on their mobile device. Collaboration and working with others can help children solve problems and make decisions, such as figuring out who carries out each task, how the working space is shared, and who takes the finished artwork home. Most of the issues were solved among themselves without any adult input; however, it was important to pay attention to their

conversations during these discussions to ensure no conflict arose, and to step in in order to regulate respectable spaces and conversations if needed.

Children's Self-Directed Investigations about the Thesis

While children were making art, they became more confident and expressed their own curiosities by asking questions about the thesis. It was a surprise to realize how intrigued they were about the topic of the thesis and what the thesis process involved. Some children noted they read the "informed consent forms" (the "contract" in their own words) by themselves. They asked questions about the audio recorders multiple times, and asked why someone would be interested in recording them for a thesis project. They seemed sceptical about the recordings at first; they also wanted to know when the audio recording was turned on or off during their snack time, noting it would be "awkward" if activities like eating were being recorded. But the children later seemed fine with the recordings; they would look at the screen and note the recording time on the devices, and some even sang into the recording devices when no adult was looking. After we asked the children for permission to ask more questions, one child participant reminded us to get the recording device ready, further showing they wanted to help with the process and making sure the adult would not forget. This was appreciated, and the child was thanked for their generous thoughtfulness. One child asked questions about how nature was related to the thesis work, and the other child participants helped to answer the question by saying that nature was the subject of the research. They asked more details about the book and when it would be ready. This shows that the children were interested in seeing the results of the study in a child-friendly format. A child participant also made suggestions as to what content to include in the thesis. One example occurred during the conversation explaining the thesis purpose, child-led learning, and discussions of child-led pedagogies; here, children brought up their own examples of Montessori

and Waldorfian schools. One child participant pointed out that this discussion would be helpful for the "thesis thingy." After the process of the audio recordings, thesis writing, and data security was explained, they further excitedly asked if what they say would be published, and if people could buy it. The idea of children being involved in a thesis research project seemed exciting and interesting for the children.

There were also conversations about name collection regarding identity safety and security laws and ethics regulations. It was explained to children that for legal and safety reasons, their real names could not be used and that nicknames or fake names would be used to protect their identity. Children gave the impression that they understood some of the topics related to names and internet security, along with identity theft.

Evaluation

The case study was not about evaluating how original an idea was, or how visually appealing the finished art project was. It was about focusing on getting children to achieve their goals and plans. During the question periods there were no right or wrong answers, and it was explained to the children that the thesis was not about criticizing or evaluating the quality of their answers or their work; only observations would be made, and some of their answers would be included as quotes.

The purpose of evaluation was to focus on their learning processes, such as how children worked and how they were inspired by the materials available to them. It was explained to them that the child-led approach placed an emphasis on children taking the lead with their ideas, experiences, and emotional reactions. Eisner suggested looking at artistic practice by using portfolios to evaluate work and progress over a period of time; however, given the short time

spent with the children in this case study, it was not possible to collect multiple artworks or to have children revisit their works to reflect on them over a period of time.

Limitations and Challenges

Children were only exposed to one Eco-artist who was Andy Goldsworthy. It is important to note that there is a great danger that land-based artists and nature-based education would omit Indigenous perspectives and the histories of the land of Indigenous communities and further thus the idea of terra nullius, the idea that the land belongs to nobody, disregarding and disrespecting the fact of Indigenous presence and claims. There were no discussions around colonialisms, or about the history of the land where the HWHG was located during the case study.

Recruitment Outreach

One of the biggest and most difficult challenges during the case study process was reaching out to child participants. As a younger arts educator with limited connections to families who have children in the targeted age group, it was difficult to reach out to the community or to individual families. Multiple recruitment efforts were made, and after each unsuccessful effort, the case study had to be modified and restructured.

The case study was originally planned to take place in a suburban neighbourhood where child participants would interact with the case study both virtually and in person. The activities would take place outdoors at a local park due to the COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying social restrictions. An effort was made to distribute posters in a suburban neighbourhood; a total of around 500 posters were distributed, the majority by going door to door. Conversations took place with a few neighbours, who tried to get the word out who pointed out the streets where families resided. A handful of families reached out and expressed an interest, but they did not complete the ethics consent documentation in order to continue their participation. A few

families reached out with interested children who were not in the target age, but were very close. The small number of families who did complete all the documentation did not follow through because it was very difficult to co-ordinate the families' schedules to make time to work together during the summer period. Most families were out of the city for summer vacation; at the beginning of the school semester, children were involved in try-outs for extracurricular activities, so families' schedules were full. Foss et al. (2013) experienced similar challenges during their early recruitment outreach at the beginning of their study. They note that it is a difficult process to initiate interest among families; placing flyers, sending out e-mails, and setting up a table in a local library proved to be ineffective strategies. They suggest that reaching out to personal connections might be helpful, but their recommendation is to create financial incentives, such as gift cards.

The project expanded from the suburban community to the entire city. Posters were displayed in other locations, such as art stores, public libraries, art community centres, and a toy store. Digital posters were advertised on a city volunteer website, a private elementary school website, and a community-based app called Nextdoor. A few community members commented on the posts and offered their suggestions, specifically, to contact local museums and galleries. A Toronto-based children's sailing community education program coordinator also reached out on the Nextdoor App to express an interest in collaboration. Although posters and digital advertising may reach a few families, this is a passive approach to outreach and proved not to be very effective. Still, it was the most suitable outreach method during a time of a pandemic where restrictions were in place. As the social and physical restrictions from the lockdowns were lifted, a more active approach became realistic.

There could have been multiple reasons for the limited interest from neighbourhood families. Families' busy schedules and children's involvement in extracurricular activities such as sports may have dramatically intensified right after the pandemic, after a long period of isolation. The impact of education and the perceived importance of other subjects, such as STEM programs and activities, may have resulted in lack of interest in art activities. There could have also been a language barrier, where families who did not have English as a first language may not have understood the technical language on the informed consent forms.

Trust plays a significant role when reaching out for child participants, especially when this is done by an unknown person, such as a student researcher. According to Foss et al. (2013), other family concerns may revolve around privacy with virtual recordings in home spaces, time conflicts, and mistrust towards researchers. In one instance, there was a moment of suspicion and distrust within the community from a citizen who was concerned about the protection of the children. The citizen expressed concern about the safety of children if the research were to take place in a public park because the posters would attract "bad intentioned people" to the space. This concern was raised despite the fact that the study was noted as having been approved by the university ethics review board, and guardians were asked to be present during the park interaction. This situation brings up concerns about children's rights and the ethical considerations of working with children. It is, according to the law, obligatory to pay attention to the well-being of children and to consider the risks while working with children. Any professional working with children has a legal "duty to report" if any risk is taken or if harm occurs. It also brings up the argument of children's rights to be protected versus children's rights to participate. Hansen (2017) notes that cultural reluctance creates a sense of overprotection which can result in missed opportunities for children to contribute their voices, or even to

participate in activities that impact their lives. It is a power struggle between adults and children, where children are classified as vulnerable beings in need of dependency and protection (p. 8). There is a risk of not taking children's voices seriously, and therefore reducing children's sense of self and agency over their own lives.

After facing multiple challenges in reaching out to the local community and not having child participants to complete the case study, it was decided that the best course of action would be to reach out to local institutions to propose a potential collaboration. The main goal in reaching out to institutions was to reach a wider audience. Families may be more willing to participate in activities hosted by established institutions they know and trust, especially during a time period such as the March break, when families are in search of activities for their children. Cultural, educational, and community-based institutions and organizations were contacted either by email, in person, or through virtual calls. Cultural institutions included local art galleries, museums, and local art centres or non-profit organizations. Educational and community-based institutions that seemed relevant to the themes of nature and education were also contacted, such as a local butterfly conservatory. The responses were mixed: many institutions did not respond or continue to follow up with any concrete answers if they had interest in the collaboration. Other institutions that did generously give their time to discuss a potential collaboration came up with questions such as whether the case study aligned with their institutional goals, values, legal processes, and so on. For example, one gallery took the time to discuss how the case study project could be integrated into their summer camps programming, but they would not allow audio recording, which was an essential form for documentation of children's voices. They also had a strong preference for presentations of artists and educational information that related to works from their exhibitions, their gallery aims, and their institutional goals. Other institutions,

such as the local butterfly conservatory, noted they did not have regular contact with the target audience; they also expressed financial concerns, saying they needed to charge all visitors in order to meet their budgets. Other museums raised concerns about the relevancy of their spaces to art themes and recommended more arts-based institutions. Another gallery responded that they were already overwhelmed with educational programming and did not have the time to follow through on any updates on a final decision.

The HWHG agreed to collaborate and offered the case study project as a free event. The staff were very supportive and open to hosting the case study and providing the room. The gallery requested more information, such as an artist proposal with a project plan, a poster, and a brief artist biography. The case study was advertised on the HWHG website and a digital QR code was created on the poster so families could use their phones to access the gallery's sign-up page. Further posters were displayed in the community, such as at local art stores, the YMCA centre, regional sport recreational centres, local public libraries, a toy store, and a community art centre. It was decided together with the gallery that the case study would take place for one day during the March break. The day was divided into two separate sessions, morning and afternoon. Families could sign up for one session lasting three hours. A total of 11 child participants from six parents (more than one child from one parent in some cases) signed up. Informed consent forms were sent to families via email, and physical copies were brought to the site. On the day of the case study, electronic devices were charged, materials were set up, and tables and chairs were prepared. However, as time passed, not one family or child participant showed up for any of the sessions. It was a very disappointing moment. The HWHG staff also expressed their surprise and a sense of immense disappointment that no family had reached out to the gallery to cancel their slots. This unexpected turn of events led the gallery staff to quickly problem solve; they worked

together to come up with an alternative method. The gallery staff agreed to send informed consent forms home to the children aged 9–12 who were participating in the gallery's week-long March break. All six participants arrived with signed informed consent forms to participate and help complete the case study.

Collaborating with Institutions

It is valuable for any artist or art educator intending to work with institutional and collaborative-based spaces to be aware of the amount of time, energy, and finances that might be required during the recruitment process. Additional documents should be considered, such as project proposals, biographies, police checks, advertising materials, revisions of ethics-related documents, and other applications that fit the mutual agreements with an institution. Researcher/educators can consider applying for research grants or other financial resources in order to cover the costs they might incur by renting spaces, working with materials, and helping participants with visiting expenses. Other financial obligations may include printing costs for recruitment materials as well as transportation costs.

It is good practice to be aware of the institution's values or goals and how these can align with the collaborative project goals. Mutual agreements ensure trusting relationships during collaboration. Having conversations about shared goals with an institution can help the institution to understand the collaboration and to also decide if the collaboration is something they are willing to take part in (Simon, 2010, pp. 270–271). In the case study, there were conversations at the very beginning with staff members about the gallery's goals and themes around nature and art; these helped the gallery to be confident in the relevancy of the case study to the gallery's image. Institutions are also fully aware of maintaining a positive and ongoing reputation within a community; in trusting a community member to follow and respect all of the

rules and regulations, they are handing over ownership and control (Simon, 2010, p. 274). Simon further argues that many institutions want to know how a community member plans to execute a project and have participants involved. On the other hand, they do not ask too many questions about to why the community member chose that particular institution or ideas about the role a cultural intuition plays in a community (p. 271).

Some of the institutions contacted by the researcher may have politely declined for reasons relating to the staff, with their time commitments and energy limitations. Participation in institution–community collaborations can certainly be overwhelming, depending on the scope and scale of the proposed collaboration. A collaboration may also involve staff members working in unexplored or unfamiliar situations, so there might be a sense of hesitancy and discomfort. This is especially the case where there is a plan to publish the results of the collaboration. Simon (2010) suggests looking to education departments because they may be more willing to communicate and work with community-based collaborative projects, as well as having experience in working with community partners (p. 274). As shown previously, the case study as a collaboration project with HWHG could have not been completed without the help of the HWHG staff, who were part of the education department of the gallery. The members were open to collaboration and showed care by putting in effort with their quick problem-solving skills and flexibility to change around their educational programming to help get child participants and share the spaces for the case study project to be completed.

In some cases, institutions choose to deny methods such as audio recordings, especially while working with children, for legal reasons, because they are on private property, or because they may have limited working spaces and resources to work with. For example, the art gallery that denied audio recordings was concerned about shared working spaces. If some children

received consent to participate and others did not, there was no solution offered for what would be done with the data on children who might be recorded by being in the same room. The gallery only had one working space available, unlike HWAG, which had multiple rooms in separate buildings.

Bias

Very few authors who discuss research concerning children make the critique about adult positioning and bias while working with children. Aziz (2020) is an exception. He is aware of his position as an adult with adult perspectives and functioning, who works in an adult-structured society – one that controls children's learning and social spaces without acknowledging children's voices or perspectives on issues that concern them. He notes, "when discussing youth, I recognise my bias and limited insight into this important group of people, as I approach the topic from the perspective of an adult" (p. 3). There is a need to recognize and reconsider adult positions in order to begin to think about power structures in child–adult relationships. How can adults question the agency and position of children in society if adults cannot question their own positions first? Adults defining children can be problematic, because adults need to make space for children to define themselves in order for children to be take a stance and assume further leadership positions. All the data that was collected and all that was interpreted comes from an adult's perspective, where only one adult is making the decisions as which quotes or photos to use, and which examples are deemed important enough to be published in a paper.

During the recruitment process, while distributing posters throughout the neighborhood a conversation with a parent raised a few concerns around adult bias. The parent noted that their son who was in the targeted age group, would not be interested in the case study project since his interests were currently around baseball and sports. It can be noted that there are still cases where

parents make the decisions for their children, even before children are communicated about events. So, there is a lack of agency for children to even make decisions on their own. This situation can also hint towards gender biases still to be found in society where boys play sports and arts is viewed as a subject mainly girls are interested in. It also further emphasizes that what parents value is a mirror image of what society values. Art can be subjective, often with no direct or correct set of explanations and theories. Instead**,** art expands into multiple answers and inquiry investigations which can lead to vague approaches with a diverse range of outcomes. This can be hard for individuals to understand or to relate and therefore leads them to quickly dismiss the arts. So, children may also adopt these views from their parents, which their parents have adapted from what society values.

It is important to note that the child participants came with their own biases. There was a bias towards upwardly mobile families. Even though there is no quantitative or statistical data to confirm the financial background of the families that participated, there is a high possibility that families had the resources to further their children's interests. All of the child participants were self-selected in regards to being active members in the HWHG and they all were already enrolled in the entire March break programming. They understood the child-led learning concepts, even so, a child participant pointed out that they attended a Montessori school. There is a sense that child participants came from families that were already in support of child-led education and agreed to the child-led pedagogical concepts, such as allowing children to pick the topics of interests which is emphasized in Montessori classrooms. In essence, families of the child participants placed financial value and invested into children's interests by signing them up for an organized and scheduled March break program. The results would differ if the case study would take place in other more generalized community spaces where families do not necessarily

have their children exposed to child-led pedagogies. There is a chance, if a child-led project is hosted in a community space where children from disadvantaged backgrounds take part, that they could feel vulnerable and hesitant of the unknown, or uncertain of what to do when adults put children on the spotlight. The dialogues may differ because children may not be used to speak up about their opinions or ideas, some may prefer to remain silent when asked how an activity makes them feel.

Future Recommendations

If the case study were to be done again, there would be an increased focus on working with children for longer periods of time and on involving them in the data evaluation during the thesis-writing process. For example, if the project occurred over a two-day period, the first day would be a repeat of the case study, where children's voices were recorded and they took photos. On the second day, the children could revisit the conversations and photos from the first day and re-evaluate the topics or conversations that they think were important to them. Essentially, adults would be listening to children during the evaluation and dissemination of the data that was collected. This approach is similar to the Reggio Emilia approach, the Malaguzzi International Centre, and the "studio" and "atelier" approach. This approach would emphasize PAR methods, limit adult bias and would involve children in all of the stages of the research project, from the beginning, to creating, to the end, when projects are completed and data is collected in order to consider children's opinions and voices. There could also be questions about children's emotional feelings during each stage; these would focus on children's well-being at each step of the process and would allow children to reflect upon their emotional experiences and associations with nature-based and arts-based creative making and learning spaces.

In order to enhance PAR methods even further as well as child-led perspectives and to gain insights into children's worlds, it could be interesting to locate a child-centered art exhibition (art made only by children in an art gallery) and to create an art tour with a group of children asking arts-based questions. Essentially, children would be looking at artworks made by other children, and would critique them and share peer to peer learning. Alternatively, if it were possible to have two groups of children of similar ages, the children who were exhibiting and the children who were critiquing would be in the same room together, with adults watching and listening to both groups. This would mean children would be looking at artistic reflections and experiences shared by other children within children's worlds, thereby creating a sense of agency for children to lead artistic conversations in institutional spaces.

Due to the limitations of the unpredictability of Canadian weather children remained in indoor environments and worked with the prepared natural materials. Instead**,** it would be even more beneficial for children if they were in outdoor environments such as local parks, trails**,** or gardens to further explore their embodied and multi-sensory experiences. If children spent time foraging for materials or played with found objects outside**,** then there are higher chances of children to begin to establish their personal relationships with nature and to create deeper meaning with a place. They can also explore safe risk taking, as described in walking curriculums that is implied in Nature-based methods such as in Forest school pedagogy.

As noted earlier, there was a sense of bias towards upwardly mobile families, since the families placed value on their children's interests in-structured and organized programs. A future recommendation can be to conduct the case study in different places outside of institutionalized spaces such as museums and galleries. Instead, it may be helpful to look to more inclusive spaces. Accessible community spaces such as YMCA centers, public libraries, parks, social

service organizations and food banks may have frequent contact with families who might not have the financial background and are more inclusive of families who come from different socio-economical classes. It may be even beneficial to reach out to social or charity organizations who have direct contact to families in the foster care system or organizations such as the Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Canada. Hosting the case study in accessible community spaces can also increase interest and awareness and provide the resources to individuals who may have not considered being involved in arts-based practices or events before.

It would be important to incorporate discussions around Indigenous philosophies and topics surrounding Indigeneity for future nature and land-based case studies. Looking to Indigenous based pedagogies such as author Sandy Grande's work, can be a helpful resource in understanding, acknowledging and empowering Indigenous knowledge (Grande, 2015, p. 32). Further ideas can be to look to more active approaches such as reaching out to local Indigenous artists or community members to take part in the case study as a continuation of sharing knowledge and engaging community spaces. Author, Jo Chrona (2022) emphasizes especially one of many of the Indigenous educational concepts**:** to include Indigenous community members in order to engage learners to become curious about Indigenous histories, communities, culture and knowledge from Indigenous peoples. This can further bring about changes in the education systems and structures and intensify the seriousness of the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions of Canada.

Researchers and professionals in the social sciences as well as other scientific fields can look to incorporate visual based methods for many beneficial reasons. Applying Clark's Mosaic approach with tesserae such as arts-based, place-based and PAR methods, a first overall image of the "whole being child" could be assembled allowing to gain a basic understanding of the

individuality and unique personality profile of each child participant. Many enticing ideas and possibilities can be made while attracting people from science-based communities to join in on visual practices and theories. Some ideas to introduce people to visual practices can be creating creative-based fairs, events or workshops in offices, labs, businesses and other accessible community spaces such as the YMCA centres. For example, the creation of a creative studio combined with a lab to mix and incorporate methods from both fields, a studio that would be located in a community and in for everyone to attend. This hybrid creative studio and lab space can focus on a target topic or theme and art method (drawing, painting, photography, sculpture, etc.) for community members to pick out every so often, because there would be a rotation of topics over a designated time period. For example, children pick the topic of bees and the medium of sculpture. Artists can be invited during inspirational seminars who specialize in the topic or medium such as Wolfgang Buttress and his sculpture titled, *the Hive* which also incorporates scientific data from real beehives into multi-sensory and embodied experiences for educational purposes. Another example may include educators such as Julia Marshall (2019) who can be invited as guest speakers to talk about their experiences working with concepts of "creative-inquiry" and incorporating visual and arts-based theories into ideas such as community-based curriculums and educational projects with children.

These collaboration ideas can establish partnerships from a whole group of diverse people and backgrounds that may have never worked together before. For example, community members may include children, farmers, Indigenous individuals, garden workers, urban administrators, artists, scientists, social workers, educators, psychologists, therapists and families. It can create open minded possibilities for innovation, creation and idea generation.

Another example could be social workers such as child-care workers, psychologists and therapists who include listening methodologies inspired by the Mosaic approach and other methods such as PAR, arts-based and nature-based methods to dramatically help to create diverse communication methods. Using sketchbooks or journals can be helpful while working with patients when encouraging them to communicate, and express their emotions, thoughts and their concerns regarding well-being and healing. If patients were to consent to their visual documentation to be exhibited it can help expand the audience and challenge the stigmatization of mental health and illness in underrepresented communities. If more awareness towards mental-health is emphasized, then the attention can be drawn towards politicians and the government to be more supportive of mental-health and the well-being of communities and youth who need it urgently. Working with the arts and sciences can form inclusive spaces by collaborating with misrepresented communities.

Conclusion

The overall aim of the thesis is to encourage and give inspiration to researchers of multiple fields such as social sciences to pay more attention to the voices of children. The research demonstrated that respectful collaboration in learning environments is achievable while working with children to support their voices. The use of a case study and a few tools, like PAR, place-based and arts-based methods within this study together with interviews proved to be helpful in collecting children's voices, gaining their insights, and supporting child-led approaches. Children noted that working with nature-based and artist materials during the making of their art projects created enjoyable and relaxed learning spaces for them. It was during these creative art-making spaces that children felt comfortable enough to ask their own questions

about the thesis and research project whose very subject they were themselves. This shows a sense of power balance between child and adult engagement, where both children and adults are equally entitled to ask each other questions. The topic of nature and art was used as a tool to help open discussion and dialogue; here, children shared their opinions and ideas and reflected on their past learning and creating experiences with adults. From working on the collaborative art making projects, it became a reality that the adults only took on helping and supporting roles as the children worked with the tools and materials; by introducing children to eco-artist Andy Goldsworthy and by offering very diverse materials, the adults ignited the children's wonderings, inspiration, and imagination. The children took on leadership roles, directing adults what to do during the creative process. An unexpected moment occurred when children took an interest in the thesis research and wanted to be a part of the process by adding their suggestions as what conversations could be added to the thesis. This shows that some children even have an interest in being part of research, and working with children can result in a very positive and mentally stimulating experiences for child participants.

There is a possibility, when working with children in research that new, fun, engaging ideas and perspectives can be found. By taking children's voices, opinions, and interests all together more seriously, researchers can create deeper and more meaningful education for children. If children are taken seriously and have more agency in our societies of today, then children can become more self-aware, confident, independent artists and creative, socially engaged citizens who won't shy away from taking on leadership in our societies of tomorrow.

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Appendices

Appendix A
Verbal informed assent statement script for child participants

Hello, my name is Muriel and I would like you to help me and other kids make art. I am adult who is greatly interested in what you and other children your age has to say. I want to listen to your ideas, imagination, opinions and your experiences while making art. When we are working together in this room, we also have to make sure we respect one another. This means waiting for our turn to speak, being quiet when somebody else is talking and thinking before we speak. Our words and opinions can impact somebody's feelings, so we want to be respectful. If we do not agree with somebody's ideas, we can offer other ideas that might work better for a project in a positive way.

First, I am going to show you a short presentation and a few photos of artworks made by environmental artists. These artists work with things like twigs, flowers, snow, and recycled materials as an inspiration for ideas of how (some artists) to work in and or with nature. Then I have a character sheet for you complete. We will work together and brainstorm ideas for our own art project. You can show each other ideas through drawings, making lists, storytelling or any other way that works best for you. Then we will create a nature art project together. You are welcome to use the camera to take photos of any of your work and art project or any other work you have created that you think is important to you.

In the meantime, I will also ask you some questions and your opinions about art, learning, and education. I will ask you questions like: *Do adults always listen to children? What do you think it means to be a good teacher?* And I also want to know your thoughts on what you liked or disliked. We will also talk about how you would teach somebody to create an art project like yours. We will also imagine together how we would teach art programs to other kids in the future.

You will design a character in the character activity sheet. This character can be anything such as an animal, colour, superhero, etc. At the end of the art project, I will make an illustrated book with your character and I will also add some of your ideas and some things that you will say. I will send this illustrated book to your parents' email. It is my way of saying thank you for helping me.

It is ok at any time to ask for a break and you can let me know if you want to sit and watch or get a colouring sheet or another small activity. If you do not want to do the project anymore, please know that no one will be angry or upset.

Appendix B
Informed consent statement
Working and Collaborating with Children,
Exploring partnerships between art educators and children to support their voices and perspectives in art education.

Nature Art Project

SMU REB # 22-072
Muriel Farmer murielfarmer@nscad.ca
Under the supervision of David B Smith dsmith@nscad.ca

Master of Arts in Art Education
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This research has been reviewed and cleared by the Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions or concerns about ethical matters, you may contact the Saint Mary's University Research Board at ethics@smu.ca or (902) 420-5728

Introduction:

My name is Muriel Farmer, I am an artist and student researcher in the Master of Arts in Art Education program at NSCAD University. As part of my thesis under the supervision of David B. Smith, I am conducting art-based research in collaboration with children ages 9-12 who live in or near the Municipality of Waterloo (Waterloo, Kitchener and Cambridge). I am interested in children's worldviews and what they have to say about their learning experiences. I want to show that children's voices and ideas are not only valued within the community, but can also contribute towards advancing more meaningful education.

The project takes place at the ***Homer Watson House & Gallery*** on **March, 17th** and it will take place ***either*** during the **morning** workshop (9-12am) **or the afternoon** workshop (1-4pm).

What is the purpose of the study? The aim of the research is to identify and test out practical ways to support child-centered perspectives and learning in art education. The student researcher wants to explore how to create partnerships between adults and children through collaborative artmaking processes.

Who is involved? Children **9-12 years of age**.

Important Dates and Times: The workshop will take place for **3 hours on Wednesday, March 15th, 2023.** Families and child participants choose *either* the morning *or* afternoon. The morning workshop takes place from **9-12 am** and the afternoon workshop takes place from **1-4pm.**

What will your child be doing during the nature art project? Children will be watching a child-friendly presentation which includes images of artists, artworks and short video clips of the artists such as Andy Goldsworthy working in outdoor spaces. Then children will be in small

groups where they will be talking, planning and working with other children and making mind-maps, lists, drawings, etc., to help explore and visualize their ideas. Children will create their art projects using natural materials (leaves, flowers, twigs) and art materials (glue, paper, crayons) which will be provided. Children will receive a sketchbook and a pencil to take home with them. Children will also have the opportunity to take photos of their work with a camera on site.

The student researcher will be there to guide them during this project. If your child wants to take a break, they can let the student researcher know verbally that they want to sit and watch. The student researcher will give them the option to work on alternative art activities such as colouring sheets.

They will be also be asked questions during the workshop such as:

1. Do you think there are things that kids can do better than adults?
2. What does the word 'community' mean to you?
3. Can you describe what it is like for you to be a part of a community?
4. What do you like best when a teacher tries to teach you something new?
5. Can you think of any past experiences where you enjoyed learning something new which was important to you?

Confidentiality: The things that your child says and the art that they make during the workshop will be associated with their age and a nickname (pseudonym) and **not** their real names. Children can create their nicknames (pseudonym) while working on the "character design activity sheet".

Photos: The photos will ***only be*** of the children's art projects, ideas, brainstorming work and activity sheets. These photos will be used in the thesis as visual examples. **There will be *NO* photos of your child's identity!**

What will be done with my child's data? All digital data will be stored securely with a password protected hard drive and computer. Any physical data will be securely locked in a portable strong box. Only the research team will have access to the data. The student researcher will retain the data for 3 years at which point it will be destroyed.

Possible Benefits: The main goal is for your child to develop their imagination, observational and creative skills. It is an opportunity for your child to be involved in a nature and art inspired event. They will play and explore with various materials in collaboration with other children. It may result in your child making new friends who live in the same region. Your child may be able to practice skills such as collaboration, confidence building and communication. They can also practice their planning, presentation, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.

It is an opportunity to rethink education and curriculum design by considering what the children themselves like to do.

The results of the study may provide information for academic researchers who are interested in child voice, adult-child relationships, listening methodologies and art education.

Potential Risks/Harms: The risks of participation do not exceed that experienced in everyday life. Physical risk may include fatigue, physical contact with others, or exposure to the natural elements (such as flowers, leaves). Emotions such as frustration may be experienced as a natural

part of the creative process. The student researcher will offer frequent breaks with drinks and peanut-free snacks. Children can also choose to end the activity if they get too tired.

As with all individuals working with children who are obligated to file the "Duty to Report" if they notice a child being harmed. Individuals are obligated to contact a local children service; in Waterloo it is the *Family and Children Services of the Waterloo Region*. More information about the legal process and contact information at https://www.facswaterloo.org/.

Accommodation: If there is a complex need, the parent can reach out to the student researcher and discuss any concerns and how the parent(s)/guardians can take an active role to help their child on site during the activities.

Freedom to withdraw: Your child's participation is voluntary and you or the child can withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. Children's data can be withdrawn up until April 1st, 2023.

If your child wants to withdraw their participation, all physical data from your child will be shredded. Any digital data such as their names, nicknames and age will not be used and what they say during the workshop will also not be used for the final thesis. However, if they choose to withdraw, they may have some of their contributions to group ideas and art project be published in the final thesis paper and the illustrated book.

What will be done with the research results? The things that your child says and images of the art that they make will appear in the thesis which will be deposited in the open access digital NSCAD library repository. The result of the project may also be included in journal articles, book chapters, or conference presentations.

Will there be any compensation? The caregiver or the child participant will ***NOT*** receive any type of payment. However, out of gratitude to show my appreciation and thankfulness for agreeing to participate, the student researcher will send an illustrated book to each child at a later date. This illustrated book will include children's quotes, ideas, photos of the art projects, and an artistic representation of your child. They will be asked to pick a favourite character, animal, colour, etc., that your child thinks best represents them. The illustrated book will be distributed back to the parent digitally through e-mail. Children have to attend the entire workshop to receive the illustrated book. Children will receive a *Nature Art Award* and receive some insect stickers as a thank-you for participation in person.

Parental Permission for Children Participation in Research

Please sign the statements and either send a photo or a scanned copy back to murielfarmer@nscad.ca **Please keep one copy of this form for your own records.**

You agree to have your child voluntarily participate in the *Nature Art Project*. You have read the information provided about the study, project description, what your child will be doing, confidentiality, photos, risks/benefits, data and compensation. You are aware that you and your child have the option to withdraw at any given time during the study. The student researcher will also ask verbal consent from your child.

Please Note: By agreeing to participate in this study, I understand that I am not giving up any legal rights if I or my child are harmed during the research.

Please **check Yes or No for the following statements**.

I agree to have my child **attend** the Nature Art Project at the Homer Watson House & Gallery.

Yes ____ No ____

I agree to have my child be audio recorded.

Yes ___ No ____

I agree that what my child says during the recorded (audio) will be transcribed and used as quotes in the thesis.

Yes ___ No ____

I agree that **observational notes** will be taken of what my child says or creates during the activity.

Yes ____ No ____

I consent to photographs being taken of my child's **artwork and handwritten notes (physical data)** which will be used in the research for the thesis and in the illustrated book.

___Yes ___No

_____ Child Age: _____
Name of child

_____ _____ Date:
Name(s) of parent/guardian(s) Signature or initials of parent/guardian(s)

E-mail address:

Appendix C

Homer Watson House & Gallery, Nature Art Project Schedule and Questions

9:00-**Introduction**

Welcome, families arrive, permission forms signed, explain main concepts
I need permission for children to participate. This includes audio recordings, to record children's answers to questions. The audio recordings will be digitally saved onto a password protected computer. Any physical data will be kept in a locked strongbox. What kids will say and photos of the art project may be put in an essay which would be published at my university library.

9:15-Assent Form for kids, explain the project, Rules, Character Activity Sheet

9:30- **Research related questions**

What do you think it means to be a good teacher?
What do you like best when a teacher tries to teach you something new? (listen to a story, look at a picture, answering questions, etc.,)?
Can you think of any past experiences where you enjoyed learning something new which was important to you?
Do you know what the word research means?
What does a researcher do?
Where can you find a researcher?
What role do you think I play? (Am I a researcher, teacher or learner?)

9:45-**Character Activity Sheet**

Hand out for children to complete, distribute art materials such as pencil crayons., crayons, pencils, erasers, sharpeners, etc.,.

10:05- **Art presentation**

Do you think nature can be art? (Hand out photographs of butterflies)
Have you made any project using objects found in nature in your past experiences?
What comes to your mind when you hear the word Eco artist?
What do you think Eco means?
Can you think of other words that start with eco? (Possible answers include: ecology, ecologist, economics, economist, ecosystem, ecozone, ecotourism, ecocatastrophe)

Definition of an Eco-Artist

Artists that use materials form the natural environment. Some artists also use objects that are often thrown away, this includes garbage that is polluting the environment.
So, they use recycled garbage and make it into something new and exciting such as art!
Eco-artists also think about our relationships with nature. They look at how humans impact water systems or forests. An example can be how cutting down forests to build cities can impact animals and nature relationships or the dramatic change to the environment.
They also look to nature for inspiration such as the shapes, lines and colours found in nature.
There are other words used to describe Eco-artists such as, "Environmental Artists" and "Land Artists".

Here are artworks from **Andy Goldsworthy** he is an example of one eco-artist.

Present Artwork: Andy Goldsworthy, (1990). *Sweet Chestnut, Autumn Horn* [leaves]. In *Andy Goldsworthy, a collaboration with nature.* Harry N. Abrams Incorporated, New York. (Original work 1986).

Andy Goldsworthy, (1990). *Rowan leaves laid around hole collecting the last few leaves nearly finished dog ran into hole started again made in the shade on a windy, sunny day.* In *Andy Goldsworthy, a collaboration with nature.* Harry N. Abrams Incorporated, New York. (Original work 1987).

Questions about "Sweet Chestnut, Autumn Horn"

What does the art look like?"
Where do you think it came from?
Is it from an animal?
Look closer, what do you think it is made out of?
Is soft, hard?
What can you do with this?
What do you think is inside?

Further Questions:

What do you think about this artwork?
What materials do you think the artists uses?
Where do you think the artist found the materials?
Where do you think the artist got their inspiration from?
What is a message the artist is trying to tell you in your opinion?
What can you do with it?
What shapes do you notice?
What does this remind you of?

Questions about "Rowan leaves laid around hole collecting the last few leaves nearly finished dog ran into hole started again made in the shade on a windy, sunny day. In Andy Goldsworthy, a collaboration with nature."

What do you think this art is made out of?
Where do you think he got the colours from?
Where do you think the hole goes to?

The artists observe how nature and the weather changes their work into something new. Sometimes something unexpected happens and Andy Goldsworthy has to do his art over again. For example, he made this artwork in a park and when he was almost finished, suddenly a dog ran through the leaves and made the leaves go everywhere! And then he had to start all over!

10:25- Explain art project, Show materials

10:30- Break, snack, drink and washroom break.

10:45-Divide children into groups

Re-enforce questions around themes, working together, and who does what roles.
Children can use journal to write down thoughts, ideas, paper for sketching out and planning.
Children have around 1hour to make the nature art project.

11:45-**Art Project reflections**

Can you describe what it is like to belong to a group and work together?
How did you feel during this whole art project?
What did you like and dislike about the art project?
If you were to do the art project again, what would you do differently?
If you had a friend/buddy who wants to do you art project in the future, how would you teach it to them?
What type of project would you project would you pick for your art class at school?
Will you ask questions, have new ideas, think about certain themes such as environmental?
Do you have any other ideas, thoughts, questions or suggestions?

12:00- **Art awards, stickers**

Appendix D

Character Activity

My name: _____

Age: _____

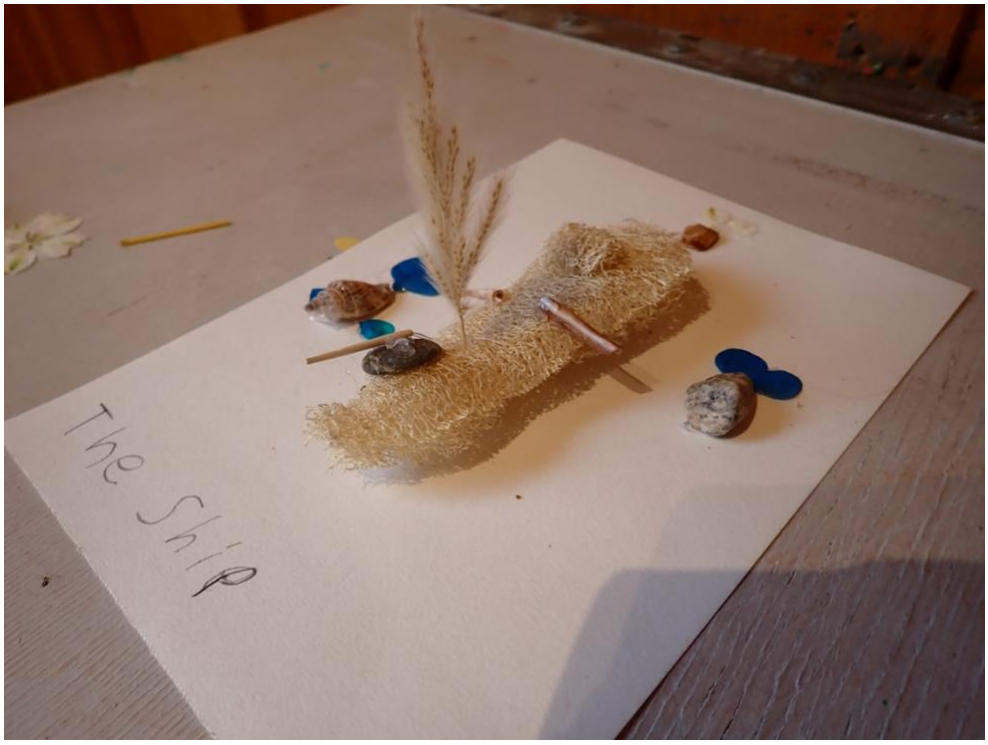
Please choose a nickname: _____

Please draw a character that you think best represents you. Your character can be anything! You can pick your favourite colours, shapes, animals, lines and a face.

Draw your character in the circle below.

Appendix E

Examples from case study made with children.


The Ship