

# **A Picasso or a Pre-schooler? : Ways of seeing the ‘child as artist’**

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## **Abstract**

*Children’s art is commonly a central feature in early childhood classrooms. Adults readily display the art of young children in prominent locations for others to admire. The practice of displaying young children’s visual art poses several questions about the child and his or her artistic expression. Are these children likened to professional artists? How do children feel about their own art being displayed? What methods of display are appropriate, if any?*

*A review of the early childhood art education literature offers ways of seeing the ‘child as artist.’ Artistic learning is complex in and of itself, and to further complicate matters, art education has not progressed in a linear fashion and lacks a unified organisational structure. However, the place of art in the curriculum and the best way of teaching art to young children are central debates within the field of early childhood art education.*

*This paper draws on doctoral research that attempts to explore ways of seeing the ‘child as artist’ within the context of early childhood art education and presents an argument for a new understanding of young children’s experiences with the display of their own visual artwork.*

## **Introduction**

Adults often express appreciation of children’s ability to create art at a young age. This appreciation is commonly demonstrated, particularly in early childhood classrooms, through the display of children’s artwork in prominent locations. Adults offer comments to children, when their artwork is on display – possibly even alluding to the artwork’s comparability to that of a famous artist, such as Picasso.

The practice of displaying children’s artwork is accepted as part of the early childhood experience for children, yet little research has been done in relation to this aspect of the school experience. Despite the significance of this practice within early childhood classrooms and the emphasis on children’s rights, the limited research that exists in the field of early childhood art education is adult-oriented and does not take into account childhood experiences.

This paper reflects upon approaches to art education within the field of early childhood education, pedagogical relationships between art education and its location within early childhood education, and the marginalisation of young children’s experiences with the display of their own artwork within the literature, supporting the need for better understandings of the concept of the ‘child as artist.’

## **Approaches to Early Childhood Art Education in Schools**

Within the field of early childhood art education, two central debates exist: (1) the place of art in the curriculum; and (2) the best way of teaching art to young children. Artistic learning is complex and therefore debated in the writing of experts in art education such as Derham (2001), Eisner (1988), Gardner (1993), Seefeldt (2002), McArdle & Piscitelli (2002), Wright (1991) and others all representing different perspectives. To complicate matters, art education has a non-linear progression, therefore it lacks a unified organisational structure (Efland, 1990).

Influenced by political, social, cultural, religious and economic views of childhood, approaches to early childhood art education, and, in turn view of the ‘child as artist’, are framed by philosophical perspectives of

early childhood pedagogy, such as child development theory and the sociology of childhood (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; McArdle & Piscitelli, 2002; Pollock, 1983).

Although art education practices vary widely, three major approaches to teaching art in Western nations can be broadly categorised as progressive, discipline-based and contemporary (Efland, 1990). Each approach offers very specific views of young children and the place of art within the wider school curriculum (McArdle, 1999; 2001). Each of these approaches are considered in turn.

### **Progressivism**

Following the industrial developments of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the social progressive attitude of modernists influenced formal education practices. Philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau's (1762/1991) *Emile* presented the naturally developing child, and later the progressive work of John Dewey (1915) legitimized arts as an educational experience which focuses on social activity.

Progressive approaches to art education encouraged students to have freedom of choice within a structured setting (Soucy & Stankiewicz, 1990). Freudian psychology led to investigations of the child's mind and intelligence (Goodenough, 1945). In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the work of psychologists Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson, which investigated children's reasoning ability at different ages, provided two dominant approaches to studying the naturally developing child (Cleverley & Phillips, 1976). With these two child development theories, the age/stage grouping asserted that progress is marked by a child's natural ability to complete tasks on the way to reaching maturation (James et al., 1998).

Influenced by Piaget's (1950) theory of child development, art educator Victor Lowenfeld's book, *Creative and mental growth* (1957) endorsed child-centred art education with the articulation of a stage theory of children's art development (Feldman, 1995). Lowenfeld & Brittain's (1970) approach has been identified also as *laissez-faire*, as it focuses on artistic expression through "natural-unfolding" behaviours.

Developmental theory, which dominated early childhood education and in some cases continues to dominate contemporary educational settings, is the foundation of the progressive approach (Feldman, 1995). Therefore, the theories of Lowenfeld & Brittain (1970) continue to heavily influence art education in schools today (Speck, 1989).

This "hands-off" approach to art education is evident in the work of art educator and teacher, Frances Derham (2001). Inspired by the progressivism of Lowenfeld & Brittain (1970), in her book entitled *Art for the child under seven*, Derham (2001) describes three stages of artistic development: the manipulative, the symbolic (but unrecognisable), and the recognisable (pp. 10-13). The exhibition, or display, of artwork is held only for the children in the classroom. Lowenfeld & Brittain (1970) recommend children select which of their own artwork should be displayed, and that classroom exhibits be changed frequently as "a youngster quickly loses the intimate relationship to his [sic.] own work, and it is senseless to display work that was done weeks or even months earlier." (p. 79) Art competition is classified as either "natural" (inherent in every classroom situation) or "forced" (imposed upon by adults for a prize or reward) (1970). According to Lowenfeld & Brittain (1970), competition has no meaning to young children, but becomes more meaningful as they get older.

Progressivism has been criticised for its lack of interactive learning, with further research into children's artistic learning style (Boughton, Eisner, & Ligtvoet, 1996; Chapman, 1978; Wilson, Wilson, & Hurwitz, 1987). Wilson & Wilson (1987) advocated guided learning from an early age as opposed to through a child's natural development. Eisner (1988) argues "stages of development that educators refer to underestimate what children are capable of producing." As a result, a discipline-based approach to art education emerged (Eisner, 1988).

### **Discipline-based Art Education**

In the 1960s, debates arose around the rationale for teaching art. Instead of teaching art as a form of creative self-expression as in the past, art educators promoted the idea of art as a discipline (Efland, 1990). The focus of art education moved from child-centred to subject-centred with the development of discipline-based art

education (DBAE) by well-known American art educator Elliot Eisner (Efland, 1990). Advocates of DBAE believed that art should be considered equal to all other subjects within the curriculum. DBAE focused on the study of art history, criticism, and aesthetics, along with the production of artwork (Eisner, 1988). DBAE melded well with the emphasis on developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) by early childhood educators and National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (Bredekamp, Copple, & National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1997).

The discipline-based approach justified the place of art within the curriculum by replicating existing models for traditional subjects, and also offering a holistic approach to art education (Eisner, 1988). Eisner (1988) asserts that the artwork of children is a non-verbal language, making it as significant as verbal language and the overall development of the child. Originally critiqued for having too strong of a focus on the production of artwork (Kindler & National Art Education Association (U.S.), 1997), Eisner's (1988) discipline-based art education broadened art experience beyond the art studio and developed stronger integration of studio approach into components of the curriculum (Greer, 1997). Display of artwork is not overtly discussed as part of DBAE; rather it is alluded to as part of the evaluative process of the curriculum, teaching and the outcomes of the program (Eisner, 1988).

In comparing the progressive (child-centered) approach and discipline-based art education, Jeffers (1990) notes that the role of the teacher in both approaches is minimal. With progressivism, the teacher does not intervene with the child's artwork; with DBAE, the teacher manages the prescribed curriculum with little interaction with the child's artwork (1990). In addition to progressivism and DBAE, more contemporary approaches to art education have developed (Efland, 1990).

### **Contemporary Approaches**

Generally, the emergence of Postmodernism in the 1980s promoted art as social reconstruction (Efland, 1990). Art was viewed as another way to transform society by celebrating diversity in art curriculum. Art educators began to build curriculum around concepts such as multiculturalism, feminism, and popular culture (Efland, 2002). Two of the main approaches are community-based art education and the Reggio Emilia approach to art education.

### **Community-based Art Education**

Community-based art education (CBAE) for young children emerged out of DBAE (Efland, 1990). The new CBAE curriculum linked art to human and cultural experience (Congdon, Bolin, & Blandy, 2001). Postmodern art educators challenged progressive approaches to art education. Lowenfeld's (1970) universal stages of artistic development were brought into question, as art educators debated the future of art education (Efland, 2002). In addition to traditional media, new media (e.g., art that does not fall within conventional art areas, such as video art) sought a place within art education curriculum (Efland, 2002).

Some contemporary approaches include school-wide art projects (Hinde, 1999), community-based art (Aprill, 2003), the artist-in-residence model (Grant, 2003), children's responses to professional artists (Campus Kindergarten (Brisbane Qld.) & University of Queensland. University Art Museum, 2003), after school programs for at-risk youth (Hogan, Munro, & McLean, 2005), and museums learning (Piscitelli, 2001; Weier, 2000).

### **The Reggio Emilia Approach**

The Reggio Emilia approach (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1993; Malaguzzi, Zini, Ceppi, & Reggio Children, 1998) acknowledges art as a language and recognises children's use of artistic media as integral to cognitive/symbolic expression involved in learning. Reggio Emilia, a town in northern Italy, serves as an international model for early childhood education (Edwards et al., 1993). Known as the "Reggio Emilia approach" amongst early childhood professionals, these learning centres serve as a point of reference for educators in Europe, Australia and the United States (Edwards et al., 1993). Many early childhood professionals have tried to incorporate this approach into their learning centres, not only for its emphasis on

community but also for its attention to the aesthetic environment. In these centres, educators take a project approach to teaching young children (Burnaford, Aprill, & Weiss, 2001; Edwards et al., 1993; Katz & Chard, 2000; Malaguzzi et al., 1998).

When children show an interest in a topic, the teacher strives to scaffold their learning by offering increasingly more information on the topic using components of the core curriculum. The project may involve one or a group of children (Katz & Chard, 2000). For example, children may become interested in airplanes. To support their interest, a teacher may provide materials to build a model airplane, read books about aircraft, or write songs about air travel all the while teaching the child both scientific and language skills as well as skills in other subject areas. The Reggio Emilia project approach views learning as a work-in-progress (Burnaford et al., 2001; Edwards et al., 1993; Katz & Chard, 2000; Malaguzzi et al., 1998). It is important to acknowledge the Reggio Emilia approach, as it provides a model for the display of children's artwork by adults.

Theories of multi-sensory learning (Dewey, 1958), play-based learning (Piaget, 1969), social interaction (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978) and multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993) have influenced approaches to art education and these are examined in the next section of this paper.

### **Pedagogical Relationships between Art Education and Early Childhood Education**

Traditional early childhood pedagogy, influenced by the philosophy of Rousseau along with various pedagogical frameworks and developmental theories, evolved from progressivism, Freudian psychology and the child study movement (Spodek, 1993). As demands for child care increased, policy makers recognised the need for quality care for children and sought to offer early childhood education (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2001).

Between 1989-1990, 140 countries around the world, including Australia and the United Kingdom, worked with government, early childhood professionals, carers of young children and lobby groups to ratify an international treaty for children's rights (United Nations, 1990). Other countries, such as the United States of America, support children's rights in other ways. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is an internationally recognised American organisation that also supports the rights of children by focusing on the provision of educational and developmental services and resources (Bredenkamp et al., 1997; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2001). NAEYC offers voluntary accreditation of programs for young children in an effort to maintain a standard of quality child care and education in the United States of America and overseas.

The mission of NAEYC and other organisations such as Early Childhood Australia (formerly Australian Early Childhood Association) and British Association for Early Childhood Education is to secure the best range of educational and care options and outcomes for children as they grow and develop. These organisations have had a tremendous impact on early childhood curriculum.

Based on developmental theory, NAEYC has developed a set of curriculum and assessment guidelines for early childhood educators (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2001). Referred to as "the bible" by the early childhood profession, most national and international standards take into account these guidelines (Mallory, New, & National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1994, p. 2). Early childhood educators and researchers in North America and Australia have developed guidelines for their curriculum based on the work of National Association for the Education of Young Children (Bredenkamp et al., 1997).

The NAEYC guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) require early childhood centres to ensure young children are in safe, nurturing environments that will also help prepare them for school (Bredenkamp et al., 1997). The two major tenets of the guidelines are: 1) "there are universal, predictable sequences of growth and change that occur in children during the first 9 years of life" and 2) children are individuals with unique personalities, learning styles and family backgrounds, therefore "adults are expected to respond quickly to the children's needs, desires and messages" (Bredenkamp et al., 1997, p. 9). As a result

of these tenets, “child-initiated, child-directed, teacher-supported play is an essential component of developmentally appropriate practice” (Bredekamp et al., 1997, p. 3).

These guidelines identify core subject areas including language arts, mathematics, science and social studies, but with a focus on a holistic approach which also considers physical, social and cognitive development (Bredekamp et al., 1997). Although art is not identified as a core subject area according to the guidelines (Bredekamp et al., 1997), in practice, it is a large part of the daily lived experiences of early childhood students. For example, in Australia’s Lady Gowrie Child Centres of the 1920s and 30s, Derham (2001) notes “the arts were a major part of the programme and the children’s work was kept and studied” (p. 19). The following section examines three common aspects of early childhood pedagogy—multi-sensory learning, play-based learning and social interaction—and the location of children’s art experiences within them.

### **Multi-sensory learning**

For several years, the European and American traditions of developmental early childhood education associated the term *curriculum* with the image of “the whole child” (Williams, 1999, p. 1). A holistic approach to early childhood pedagogy was an outcome of developmentally appropriate practice (Williams, 1999). Experimentation, investigation and discovery were the key to stimulating multi-sensory learning in young children (Dewey, 1938; Elkind, 1987; Katz and Chard, Malaguzzi, 1993; Piaget, 1983; Rinaldi, 1993).

Research has shown that a sensory-rich environment is necessary to stimulate young children’s learning and is foundational for creating conceptual understanding (Beck, 1967; Wright, 1991). As a result, the creation and display of bright, colourful artwork and children involved in “hands-on learning” activities are a signature of early childhood classrooms. When ideas and objects relate to young children’s experiences, feelings, and imaginative skills, they are able to make meaning of them (Sternberg, 1999). Kerlavage (1995) asserts sensory involvement with objects and artistic experiences with media enhance children’s ability to “produce, perceive, and respond to art” (p. 60). Although multi-sensory learning provides opportunities for the creation aspect of artistic learning for young children, it is interesting to note that generally speaking, decisions about the display of children’s artwork are made by adults.

### **Play-based learning**

The developmental theories of Jean Piaget (1969) and Erik Erikson (1965) investigated children’s reasoning ability at different ages. With these two child development theories, the age/stage grouping asserts that progress is marked by a child’s natural ability to complete tasks on the way to reaching maturation (James et al., 1998). Both Piaget (1969) and Froebel (1974) argue that children learn through play. Play-based learning promotes exploration and personal choice through problem-solving (Rettig & Rettig, 1999).

Froebel asserts both play and art share similar characteristics (Tarr, 1989, p. 117). Early childhood art experiences primarily focus on the exploration of various media (e.g., paint, scrap materials, clay), and take the form of paintings, collages and sculptures. The exploratory nature of early childhood art allows children the ability to make choices about the creation of their artwork through self-directed activity, yet again, decisions about the display of their creations is ultimately that of teachers.

### **Social interaction**

Vygotsky’s (1978) social constructivist theory of scaffolding children’s learning emerged from child development theory, but offers a wider perspective than developmentalism itself, adding to the debate over how best to teach art in schools. Similar to Piaget (1969), Vygotsky (1978) assumes that children construct knowledge on the basis of their experience. Unlike the ages/stages theory of child development, the theory of social-constructivism offers challenging activities with sensitive guidance through a learner-mentor model (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). Scaffolding is a pedagogical technique which promotes the transmission of knowledge from adult to child within a warm, responsive, emotional context (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). The “zone of proximal development” (ZPD) marks:

“the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978, p. 86).

McArdle asserts (1999) that the level of guidance offered by early childhood educators may influence the creation of artwork by children. Kindler’s (Kindler & National Art Education Association (U.S.), 1997) work on child development in art indicates that adult interventions must be carefully executed to ensure support of children without intrusion on the creative process. Inevitably, the dialogue that exists between learner and mentor in scaffolded learning has the potential for increasing children’s rights to make decisions about the creation and display of their own visual artwork, with minimal disruption from adults.

### **“Multiple intelligences” theory**

Howard Gardner’s (1993) “theory of multiple intelligences” has impacted on views of education and the contribution art makes to education. For several years, Eisner (1988) argued art as an “important means through which the potentialities of the human mind are brought into being” (Eisner, 1988, p. 194). Noted for his work as co-director of Harvard University’s educational research group *Project Zero* (Seidel, Eppel, & Martiniello, 2001), Gardner critiqued the notion that a single human intelligence exists that can be assessed by standard assessment tools. Instead, Gardner (1993) espoused the view of a “multiple intelligences” theory, of which the intelligence of “art is a form of cognitive activity that can be taught and learned” (Tarr, 1989; Thompson, Loftus, & Bullock, 1995).

Multiple intelligences theory has transformed views of teaching and learning (Tarr, 1989; Thompson et al., 1995). In particular, early childhood educators have reflected on their own pedagogy and the individual learning styles (Bredenkamp et al., 1997) of children in their classrooms. As with scaffolded learning, the theory of multiple intelligences offers teachers an opportunity to reassess the artistic learning styles of children and the effect of displaying artwork on their life experiences.

### **Young Children’s Experiences with the Display of their own Artwork**

What does the display of artwork look like in the early childhood classroom? According to McArdle (2001), “in Australia, for example, classroom displays still commonly feature twenty-five identical Christmas trees on photocopied paper” (p. 94). Traditionally, children’s visual artwork (e.g., paintings, drawings, collages) has been hung on walls, bulletin boards and windows in classrooms and hallways (Seefeldt, 2002). Other forms of artwork like sculptures may be featured in showcases or on tables in similar locations around a school. The target audience includes peers, other students, parents, teachers, principals, and other adults—primarily members of the school community (Seefeldt, 2002). Depending on the type of artwork (i.e., thematic culminating activity, holiday art, etc.), it can be displayed in a variety of ways, both formal and informal. For instance, if parents have been invited to the school for a special occasion, artwork from each member of the class would normally be represented in more formal display (Seefeldt, 2002). On the other hand, drawings created during self-directed activities by the children may or may not be displayed based on the teacher’s decision.

Art educator and teacher Frances Derham (2001) offers practical advice for displaying student artwork:

“For the kindergarten or school that wishes to keep a proportion of its children’s art for display or for study, I suggest the following—All work be hung on the wall until the end of the week. Then the children are allowed to take an agreed number home; The problem of how to hang all can be solved by either putting thin 2 ½ in. nails into a “pinning” strip of wood on the wall and thrusting six or even eight drawings on each pair of nails—or using big “bulldog” clips which hang on the wall.” (p. 82)

These suggestions for managing the display of children’s artwork in early childhood classrooms focus on the practicality of teaching. They address issues of display from a program perspective, where the focus is on the

current theme. Democratic issues of space and fair representation are also noted. By stating that the “children are allowed to take an agreed number home” indicates the child has some choice regarding their own artwork, but ultimately, the teacher will decide how and when children’s artwork will be sent home.

Documentation of children’s work at various stages in the learning process is a hallmark of Reggio Emilia learning centres (Burnaford et al., 2001; Malaguzzi et al., 1998). Display boards are located around each centre demonstrating children’s learning as participants in projects. In Edwards, Gandini and Forman’s book entitled *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach to art education* (1993), various forms of documentation “validate the children’s self-esteem, and more importantly, provide a systematic way for children to revisit their experiences (with attendant thoughts and feelings) and then reconstruct and reinterpret them in a different way” (p. 265).

Reggio Emilia centres have specific guidelines for displaying work on the documentation boards, so that they are uniform and designed to enhance the existing aesthetic environment (Burnaford et al., 2001; Edwards et al., 1993; Malaguzzi et al., 1998). Adults, including the *atelierista* (teacher trained in art education), assemble the documentation boards after selecting the contents from the children’s project work (Edwards et al., 1993). With this model of display, negotiation may or may not occur between teacher and student regarding the content of the board.

Based on the principles of the documentation style of Reggio Emilia learning centres, Seefeldt (2002) considers the display of children’s artwork “a form of communication” (p. 14). Similar to the work of Lowenfeld & Brittain (1970), Seefeldt (2002) recommends labelling displays to assist parents in recognizing the importance of “scribbles, random drawings, and the seemingly abstractness of children’s paintings” (p. 15). Also, Seefeldt (2002) suggests writing explanations of children’s scribbles and/or symbols to “inform and reassure parents that their children are learning” (p. 15). These suggestions assert that children’s artwork should be valued by adults, as it forms a means of evaluating children’s learning. As with the Reggio Emilia approach, the amount of influence children will have on the display of their own artwork following Seefeldt’s suggestions is not clear.

### **Competition and the Display of Children’s Artwork**

Artwork is displayed with an audience in mind. Art-making is a process which results in a product. In light of children’s artwork being displayed as a means of communication and documentation of learning (Edwards et al., 1993; Seefeldt, 2002), it is important to consider variations in children’s ability (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1970). The very nature of developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp et al., 1997) asserts that children are individuals with unique life experiences.

Regardless of how much effort teachers put into equally representing children’s artwork in their classroom, members of the public audience will judge the ability of one creation over another (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1970). With this in mind, Derham (2001) cautions that art competitions have the potential to cause damage to a child’s sense of themselves and their ability to create art:

“There are few things more damaging to the real development of a child’s art than a competition. The child who wins often merely repeats his winning work without improvement, or he actually regresses. The children who lose are apt to imitate the winning exhibit, to the great detriment of their own power to think for themselves. Or, as this happens, they feel that they can’t work in the manner of the winner, and they forsake art, sometimes never to try again.” (p. 79)

Due to the personal association with their work, professional artists themselves have identified exhibiting their own work to be a traumatic experience for fear of criticism (Kirchenbaum & Reis, 1997; Mace, 1997). Derham (2001) discourages art competitions as well as group discussions about children’s art. On the other hand, sensitive talk about children’s art between an adult and child, a technique used by art therapists as a way to establish rapport with emotionally disturbed individuals of all ages, enhances the art experience

(Derham, 2001; Wilson et al., 1987). This suggests that increased adult sensitivity to the display of artwork in early childhood settings may result in a more positive artistic learning experience for young children.

### **Researching the Display of Children's Artwork**

In recent years, research in early childhood art education has gained attention (Bresler, 1992; Kindler & National Art Education Association (U.S.), 1997; Piscitelli, 1993; Thompson et al., 1995; Wright, 1991). Although a large amount of art education research focuses on older children (over the age of 8-years-old) and adolescents (Fiske, 1999), numerous studies of young children's art experiences have been published. Research indicates that art fosters cognitive development (Eisner, 1996; Gardner, 1993; Seefeldt, 1999). Early childhood art education studies have focused on drawing as a tool for young children's reflections (Brooks, 2005; Chang, 2005), young children's responses to art in museums (Anderson, Piscitelli, Weier, Everett, & Tayler, 2002; Piscitelli, 2001; Weier, 2000, 2004), and art education pedagogy in early childhood settings (McArdle, 1999; McArdle & Piscitelli, 2002) to name a few.

To date, very little has been published on the display of children's artwork. Although display has been recognised as important, research suggests that studies have not focused on this issue. Most publications available to teachers emphasise the process of creating art and how the end product will appear. Little to no attention is given to the display of the final piece of art. *Creating rooms of wonder: Valuing and displaying children's work to enhance the learning process* appears to be one of the few books available in English that asserts that children's artwork should be displayed in a thoughtful, caring way (Seefeldt, 2002). In Chapter 1, 'The ABC's of displaying children's work', according to Seefeldt (2002), "by displaying children's work, teachers affirm children's thoughts ideas and imaginations, beautify their world, communicate to others, document what children learn, and extend and expand children's learning" (p. 11). This statement demonstrates the prominence of using the display of children's artwork in early childhood settings to evaluate children's learning.

In an article entitled "*All done! Take it home. Then into a trashcan?: Displaying and using children's art projects*", Kim, Park and Lee (2001) respond to display and usage of children's art projects. They suggest ways for teachers to enhance the process of creating art for children. Based on a claim by Cain & Dweck (1995) that the engagement of children with art activities is a personally meaningful experiences and offers them a sense of accomplishment, which leads to higher self-esteem, the authors state that, "[c]hildren take delight in seeing their work put to use in some way" (Kim et al., 2001, p. 42). Suggestions for teachers to extend art experiences for young children include creating big book covers, making musical instruments, and designing attendance charts.

In an editorial entitled, *How we respond to the artistry of children: Ten barriers to overcome*, Mary Renck Jalongo (1999) describes her own "informal and admittedly unscientific survey" of practicing teachers enrolled in a graduate level course in creativity and the arts for young children (p. 205). Jalongo's observations indicate that many practicing teachers are affected by their own negative experiences and feelings of inadequacy in the arts. Clearly, her work indicates a level of awareness that art education training should be made available to early childhood educators, as their own values and experiences will impact young children. In other words, lack of understanding for educating young children in the arts could greatly affect children's learning. This presents a strong argument for researching young children's experiences with the display of their own visual artwork.

### **Conceptualising Children's Experiences with the Display of their own Visual Artwork**

Research into the display of children's artwork is virtually non-existent (Jalongo, 1999; Kim et al., 2001; Seefeldt, 2002), yet it is considered an important aspect of artistic learning (Derham, 2001; Eisner, 1988; Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1970; Seefeldt, 2002). The literature notes the main reasons for displaying children's artwork are: 1) children's art is considered a non-verbal form of communication (Wright, 1991) and 2) children's artwork is a means of documenting children's learning and development (Edwards et al., 1993; Seefeldt, 2002). Guidelines for displaying children's artwork are practical in nature (Derham, 2001; Edwards

et al., 1993; Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1970) and focus on equal representation (McArdle, 2001). Research into artist's responses to their artwork being displayed show that due to the personal association with their work, exhibiting their own work may be traumatic due to their fear of criticism (Kirchenbaum & Reis, 1997; Mace, 1997). Adult sensitivity to young children's artwork has been identified as critical to children's self-esteem and interest in art (Derham, 2001; Wilson et al., 1987). This demonstrates a need for an investigation into children's experiences with the display of their own artwork in an early childhood setting.

With the possible exception of Reggio Emilia (Edwards et al., 1993), previous research into art education approaches and artistic learning has been adult-oriented, rather than based on children's lived experiences. Changing ideas about the child's nature have led to new understandings of the study of children (Hockey & James, 1993; James et al., 1998). James, Jenks and Prout (1998) assert "...[i]t is undeniable that modern children are increasingly confronted with the opportunity (and, significantly, the requirement) that they are heard." (p. 6) As a result of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, efforts have been made in the translation of children's rights into international law and practice (Detrick, Doek, & Cantwell, 1992). The treaty has established a guideline for the treatment of all children by setting standards for education, health care and legal, civil and social services. Ten principles are outlined in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child; Principle 7 entitles children to receive an education to support their academic, moral and social development (United Nations, 1990). Article 13 specifically states children have the right to "freedom of expression...in the form of art" (United Nations, 1990). In practice, recognition and respect for children's rights and experiences are components of Reggio Emilia centres (Edwards et al., 1993).

The socially constructed child creates meaning through personal interactions within the adult world (James et al., 1998). Advocacy for children's rights has led to views of children as autonomous beings who are to be considered valuable informants (Mayall, 1994; Mead, 1943). Children's ability to actively participate and interpret their own experiences is derived from the sociology of childhood (James et al., 1998). Previous research on the display of children's artwork does not take into account children's rights and ability to make decisions (James & Christensen, 2000; Mayall, 1994; United Nations, 1990). The act of facilitating children's decision-making, as opposed to making decisions for them, requires negotiation on the part of the adult (Clark, McQuail, & Moss, 2003; Danby & Farrell, 2004). This demonstrates a need for an investigation that affords children the opportunity to inform adults about their lived experiences with the display of their own visual artwork. In general, the literature indicates that young children's lived experiences with the display of their artwork have been marginalized and no known research has adequately addressed ways of seeing the 'child as artist' and the display of children's artwork. As mentioned previously, the limited research that exists is adult-oriented and does not take into account childhood experiences.

## Summary

Whether adults openly compare children's artwork to that of Picasso or any other artist is not the only concern emerging from this paper. Many questions regarding children's lived experiences with the display of their own artwork also remain. A review of the literature on early childhood art education and the display of children's artwork indicate significant gaps in this aspect of research in the field of early childhood art education. In general, early childhood educationalists address issues of aesthetics in relation to the display of children's artwork, but are yet to acknowledge young children's experiences surrounding the act of artwork display and its impact on children as individuals (Jalongo, 1999; Kim et al., 2001; Seefeldt, 2002).

Since art education is a significant part of the school experience for young children and displays of children's artwork demonstrate learning to adult audiences, there is a clear need for research into the practice of displaying children's art in early childhood classrooms and the impact it has on young children. A study of young children's lived experiences with the display of their own visual artwork would contribute to the corpus of research in this substantive area. Not only would a study of this nature offer children an opportunity to share their views, in turn, it may provide an opportunity for educators, parents and others to reflect upon the practice of displaying artwork and views of the 'child as artist' in light of early childhood pedagogy and children's rights.

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