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*Published in:*  
Children & Society

*DOI:*  
[10.1111/chso.12392](https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12392)

*Publication date:*  
2021

*Licence:*  
CC BY

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in Discovery Research Portal](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Robb, A., Jindal-Snape, D., & Levy, S. (2021). Art in my world: Exploring the visual art experiences in the everyday lives of young children and their impact on cultural capital. *Children & Society*, 35(1), 90-109. <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12392>

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# Art in my world: Exploring the visual art experiences in the everyday lives of young children and their impact on cultural capital

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## Abstract

This paper presents data from a unique longitudinal study exploring the visual art experiences of nine children in two Scottish primary schools. Using a theoretical lens of cultural capital, the study is focused on spaces where children experience visual art and the value of these experiences, using arts-informed, visual methods. While each child presented a particular insight, the findings question the value of current school visual art experience over other spaces. The findings also demonstrate the capacity of children to resist the control of cultural capital by adults, engaging with visual art on their own terms.

## KEYWORDS

art education, children's voice, cultural capital, longitudinal case study, visual methods

## INTRODUCTION

Children are surrounded by the arts in their everyday lives, but the extent to which arts informs their lives, and the space in which they do so will be different for each child. Understanding these experiences from a child's perspective might support teachers to deliver meaningful arts experiences in their classrooms (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Therefore, it is important to consider: where do children experience arts and what is the value of these experiences from their perspective?

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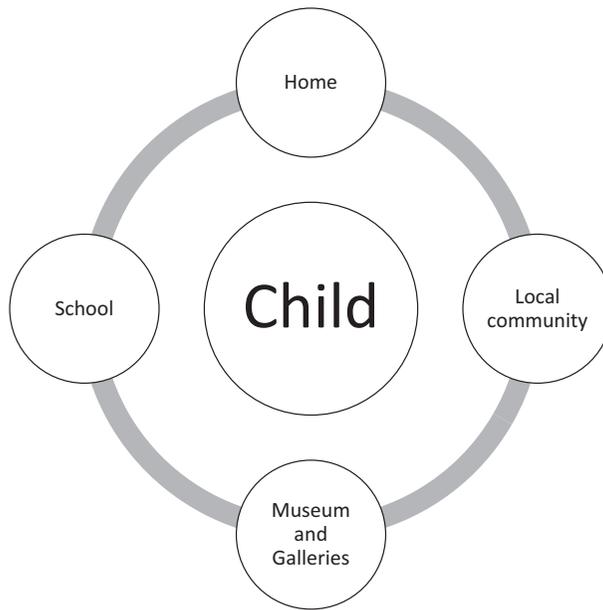
The arts are a broad field so for the purposes of this paper the focus will be on visual arts. Research has been undertaken that focuses on where children experience the visual arts (Crum, 2007; Haanstra, 2010; Mansour et al., 2016; Richards, 2014; Rose, Jolley, & Burkitt, 2006; Szechter & Liben, 2007; Tan & Gibson, 2017). Few however have explored the value of these experiences in any depth drawing on the voices of children (Haanstra, 2010; Richards, 2014). This paper is therefore focused primarily on this issue. A theoretical lens of cultural capital has been used to provide depth to the discussion of the impact of visual art experiences on the acquisition of cultural capital in relation to their value. Two research questions guided the project. First it was necessary to establish what young children's visual art experiences consisted of resulting in the following question which primarily guided the data gathering: What do visual art experiences consist of for the young child in the different domains that they inhabit? Once this was established the following research question guided the analysis of the data: In terms of cultural capital, how are these experiences valued by the children?

## VISUAL ART EXPERIENCES IN A CHILD'S WORLD

Hamblen (2002) identified three domains where children encounter visual art though these have not been drawn directly from children: in school, in museums and galleries, and in local communities. The obvious omission is that of the home. The work of Crum, Haanstra (2010) and Rose et al. (2006) addresses this omission and they all draw on data from children. Figure 1 pulls these four domains together and places the child at the centre of their world.

Visual art experiences at home, in museums and galleries, or in the local community tend to be driven by the adults who are caregivers to the child (Barrett, Everett, & Smigiel, 2012; Crum, 2007; Mansour et al., 2016; Rose et al., 2006). For those that participated in visual art experiences in these environments, the children viewed them as social experiences shared with other family members (Barrett et al., 2012; Tan & Gibson, 2017) with an emphasis on making art in the home and viewing art in the local community (Barrett et al., 2012). Support from family members could take the form of either providing expertise (Crum, 2007) or resources (Crum, 2007; Rose et al., 2006). Mansour et al. (2016) found that the education of parents and their occupation are significant factors in terms of children participating in arts activities. A limitation of these studies however, with the exception of Crum (2007), is that they have been conducted within the school environment where the power relations could have influenced the findings. They also each provide a snapshot of a particular set of circumstances drawn and analysed using a variety of methods with a variable sample size (e.g. Mansour et al. (2016),  $n = 1,172$ ; Tan and Gibson (2017),  $n = 4$ ) which makes comparison between them difficult and generalisations even trickier.

There is debate concerning the level of influence that a parent, with perceived high levels of cultural capital, has over a child's interest in visual art. Larger-scale, quantitative studies such as Mansour et al. (2016) and Melnick, Witmer, and Strickland (2011) demonstrate that this level of influence is strong. In contrast, small-scale, qualitative studies suggest that there is potential for high levels of parental cultural capital to inhibit a child's interest in the visual arts (Debenedetti, Caro, & Krebs, 2009; Savva & Trimis, 2005; Szechter & Liben, 2007). Only one of these studies however focused solely on the child (Savva & Trimis, 2005), while the other two concentrated on direct parent-child interaction; the presence of parents could have influenced child responses and does not necessarily indicate that the child would behave in a similar way, independently of the parent in a different setting. In a study in the USA, Kisida, Greene, and Bowen (2014) collected data from 10,912 pupils from 123 schools by administering a survey following a visit to a local art gallery. They found that children with low levels of cultural capital benefited more than those considered to have higher levels of cultural capital. These



**FIGURE 1** Cultural capital domains

children were more open to acquiring cultural capital. A strength of this study was that the voices of children with a range of visual art experiences and backgrounds were captured but they only provided a snapshot and long-term effect is not known.

In terms of art experiences in schools, the literature presents a breadth of experience which is impossible to generalise due to the majority of the research being small-scale, qualitative, short-term and conducted in minority-world countries (Madrid Akpovo, Nganga, & Acharya, 2018). Some highlight key differences in visual art experiences at home and school (Greenwood, 2011; Haanstra, 2010; Melnick et al., 2011; Pavlou, 2006; Rose et al., 2006). An important finding of several studies was that home was the domain of self-initiated art (Bhroin, 2007; Haanstra, 2010; Richards, 2014; Rose et al., 2006). In school, although art lessons were deemed as fun, enjoyable and different from the normal lessons that children encounter (Hallam, Hewitt, & Buxton, 2014; Watts, 2005), they tended to follow a prescribed format (Greenwood, 2011; Haanstra, 2010) or were too focused on assessment (Haanstra, 2010). It must be noted though that these studies were conducted with children at different ages and stages, at particular points in time; the result is fascinating but incomplete with no indication of how attitudes and experiences change over time because longitudinal approaches to data gathering have not been adopted.

The role of the teacher in the classroom also informed the pupil viewpoint (Callaway & Kier, 1999; Zimmerman, 2009) though there are indications that teachers require more support in terms of teaching the subject with confidence (Davies et al., 2014) which could in turn have an impact on how the subject is experienced and valued by the pupil (Adams, 2009; Fleming, 2011). For a child who has restricted exposure to meaningful visual art experiences outside of the school environment, the impact could be particularly significant and long-reaching (Lekue, 2015; Pavlou, 2006).

From the results of a systematic literature review (Robb, 2019), there are no published studies, since 2005, which comprehensively examine visual art experiences from a child's perspective across the four domains of home, school, museums and galleries, and local community. Longitudinal studies

are also not present in the literature so it is difficult to determine long-term impact of visual art experiences on cultural capital acquisition and visual art engagement in children. This paper aims to address these issues by gathering data with children over a year in two Scottish primary schools about their visual arts experiences in and out of school. Therefore, the first research question will focus on this aspect.

## CULTURAL CAPITAL THEORY

Bourdieu explored class boundaries in relation to culture through the notion of *cultural capital*, his work covering the fields of education, museums and galleries (Bourdieu, 1979; Grenfell & Hardy, 2007): his theories provide a starting point to examine the issues and the limitations highlighted in the empirical studies. Individuals acquire different types of capital over time, in various forms, physical and immaterial. Capital has value for an individual in that it provides them with credibility within the societies and systems that they inhabit. Cultural capital can be material or symbolic, and is supported by both economic and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Hewison, 2014). It can also be acquired through inheritance from previous family generations (Bourdieu, 1986; Savage, 2015). Capital can only be converted when a suitable level of understanding of the experience is achieved (Bourdieu, 1979, 1986). This therefore determines perceptions of taste and style which then creates social class boundaries that people navigate. Capital can therefore be an enabler, but it can also oppress and restrict individuals through the socially constructed values that imbue capital (McRobbie, 2005), the habitus of the individual and the social-constructed fields that we live within (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). From a child's perspective, this means that a child's thoughts towards the visual arts will be influenced to an extent by the significant adults in their lives, which leads to a cyclical reproduction of capital as the child becomes an adult (Fyfe, 2007).

Values change and this has an impact on the assignation of particular cultural activities to levels of social class. Bourdieu, conducting his research in the 1960s and 1970s, identified and labelled cultural activities in relation to high, middle and low-brow categories (Bourdieu, 1979), with art gallery visits residing in the world of the upper class. In contemporary society cultural capital is still very much a term in use, however, its composition is evolving in response to today's world. Firstly, definitions of taste and classifications such as 'high art' are changing as a range of cultural activities grow in popularity (Hewison, 2014). The value of cultural activities also varies depending on age group (Savage, 2015) with gallery visits more associated with middle-age and above, while street art is linked to younger generations. Issues such as globalisation and immigration have also increased awareness around the world of the breadth and depth of the visual arts (Chappell, 2013) and tied to this is the impact of ease of access to technology (Hewison, 2014; Savage, 2015).

From a child's perspective the evolution of cultural capital in its current form means that there is the possibility of a broader range of opportunities to acquire it. It is also possible that they have access to forms of cultural capital that are inaccessible to adults, emerging *homemade cultural* forms that are fuelled by the ever-changing world of social media (Hewison, 2014). These changes to forms of cultural capital mean that the aspirational structure of cultural capital is perhaps no longer as relevant due to the variety of cultural domains available to an individual (Lizardo, 2016). In order to explore cultural capital, its value and its forms, from a contemporary child's perspective, it is necessary to examine this not just in relation to the immediate adults in their lives but also in relation to their everyday experiences out of the classroom, the curricula in schools and delivery by teachers. If children have the

potential to create their own hierarchical structures of cultural capital how do they navigate between the two worlds of the adult and the child, in the spaces and the places where they encounter visual art? Therefore, the second research question will focus on this aspect.

## METHODOLOGY

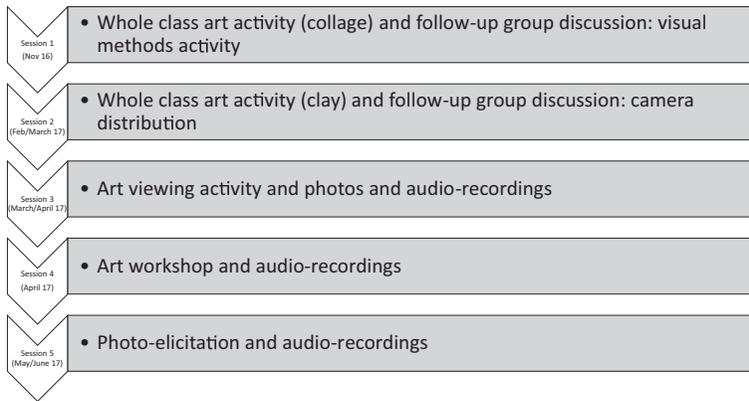
A qualitative, interpretivist framework was adopted, employing a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology (Grbich, 2013). A key element of this methodology is that data are co-constructed with participants (Kjorholt, 2013). In order to do this the methods employed were based on the tenets of narrative inquiry (Czarniawska, 2004) where narrative organises the experiences that a person has (Reissman, 2007) through the three key features of temporality, social interaction and place (Clandinin et al., 2006). This framework supported children to recount their experiences and as well as aid analysis in relation to cultural capital theory through the three key features listed above.

### Research design

The study used a longitudinal, embedded multiple case-study design (Yin, 2009) with data gathered over the course of a year (Figures 2 and 3) in order to create narrative field texts for each participant (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The design allowed children to revisit and develop their recounts rather than relying on snapshot accounts. Two schools from the same Scottish local authority volunteered to take part during the academic session 2016–2017. Non-probability, convenience sampling was employed with regards to pupil participants. Senior management in each school were asked to identify a class at the First and Second Level of the Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Government, 2008). Both schools coincidentally selected a Year 4 class (pupils aged between 7–8 years) and a Year 6 class (pupils aged between 9–10 years). All the pupils across the four classes were given the opportunity to participate though only pupils who had both pupil and parent consent could finally take part. A group of nine individual pupil case studies were compiled from the data (Figure 2). Aside from age and gender, no further demographic information was recorded for the children to ensure that they were not identifiable.



**FIGURE 2** Case study design



**FIGURE 3** Data collection timeline

## Data collection methods

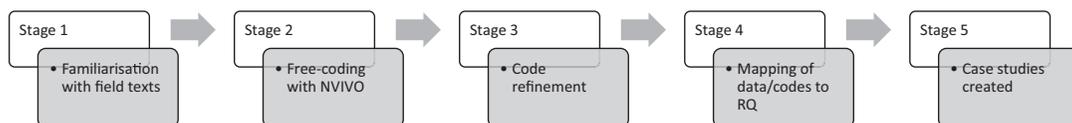
Data collection methods were designed to support the children to express their thoughts and opinions and were primarily based on visual methods (Wall, Hall, & Woolner, 2012; Wall, Higgins, Hall, & Woolner, 2013), arts-informed methods (Cole & Knowles, 2008; Leitch, 2008; McNiff, 2008) and photo-elicitation (Carawen & Nalavany, 2010; Clark & Moss, 2011; Einarsdottir, 2005; Rose, 2016). Although these methods are based on practical activities, a key element was the dialogue that arose between participants, and between participant and the researcher during and after these activities (Russell, 2007). This was essential in order to clarify meaning of what had been represented in the images and final models. A challenge when adopting these methods however is that they lend themselves to multiple interpretations which can be inconstant (Thomson, 2008). A longitudinal approach to the data collection addressed this issue as it provided an opportunity to make connections between the data rather than relying on snapshot interpretations from one activity (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The data were gathered at five time points across the academic session in both schools (Figure 3).

All sessions except Session 4 took place within the school setting; as data were gathered across the year, the school setting provided consistency, making it possible to meet with participants during this time period.

## Data analysis

The analysis of the data consisted of five stages (Figure 4, Bazeley, 2013, p. 15). The process was iterative rather than linear, meaning that there was flexibility to return to previous stages if necessary, as new data were added through the year. A reflexive diary was also kept recording reflections and decisions that were made with regards to the analysis during the process.

Using NVIVO, the texts were free-coded (Stage 2) and then refined a total of five times resulting in 17 parent nodes and 106 child nodes (Stage 3). The refinement process consisted of constant comparison between sections of text assigned to a particular code, using NVIVO tools such as Hierarchy Charts and Queries. The data for this paper has primarily been drawn from the parent nodes 'Experience' (see Table 1).



**FIGURE 4** Data analysis process

**TABLE 1** Example text from parent node ‘Experience’

Child node	Example Text
Experience – viewing art	<p>I think art's good cos whenever you're bored like “Hmmm I really want to do something but I have no ideas”, so then you can go, thinking, "why don't I just go to an art museum and look there for some inspiration!” – <i>Edward</i></p> <p>Yeah cos that's like famous art. You know like, if you see like, art from a famous museum, you would see art by a really famous artist but famous art like they've took time and that... - <i>Andrew</i></p> <p>I've never seen like sculptures and I don't really know where they are and it would be nice to go and visit somewhere else. - <i>Amy</i></p>
Experiences at home	<p>Yeah I do, like, flower pictures and I said I liked flowers. I also done my cat yesterday and I done it on my Mum's lap cos I got a picture, printed it out and then I copied it and it looks like probably exactly the same. – <i>Maia</i></p> <p>I love painting board at my house. - <i>Jake</i></p>
Experiences at school	<p>I remember in Primary 2 like we got this bit of paper and then we wrote our name and then we got other bits of paper and we did whatever we wanted and we had to make it like 3D. So like, I did, like you know how you make the fans, the paper fans, I did that and thought I'd put that on and then I put swirly bits and everything on it. – <i>Melissa</i></p> <p>Ehm we had homework first when we came into school and it was, we were learning about the Jacobites and we made erm our own shields and I made my own one with...I had crocodile pictures on there...tartan paper, for the handle it was tartan ribbon around an old Hoover and I drew the crest. - <i>Peter</i></p>
Experiences in local community	<p>I've been to the one in [<i>home city</i>]. Well I've been to the museum in [<i>home city</i>] and I think I've been to the one in Glasgow. Like with the, with the heads hanging from the ceiling... - <i>Dan</i></p> <p>Eh like whenever I go to karate we have a bit of time left before we go there we sometimes go into [<i>the local gallery</i>] or on the way back. – <i>Edward</i></p>
Experiences on holiday	<p>And that was near the church as well, the church is just there but that was like outside a shopping place and there's like lots of like art there with like water fountains and all that so I took a photo of that. – <i>Melissa on Berlin</i></p> <p>Well I like to do landscaping... When I was in Washington my hotel room looked right onto the White House so I got to landscape the trees around it. - <i>Clara</i></p>

In Stage 4, the coded sections of text were then pulled together and analysed drawing on the Clandinin and Connelly (2000) model of interaction, continuity and situation, allowing narratives to emerge for each participant. A narrative case study text was then created for each individual structured through four areas: child's identity, child's definition of visual art, and the visual art experiences for each child and the extent to which the individual was an active agent in these experiences. The nodes in Table 1 informed the section on visual art experiences. These were then compared and discussed in relation to the value of visual art in the lives of the participants which is the focus of this paper. The Results and Discussion section of this paper examines the places that emerged and were omitted through the children's narratives (Czarniawska, 2004).

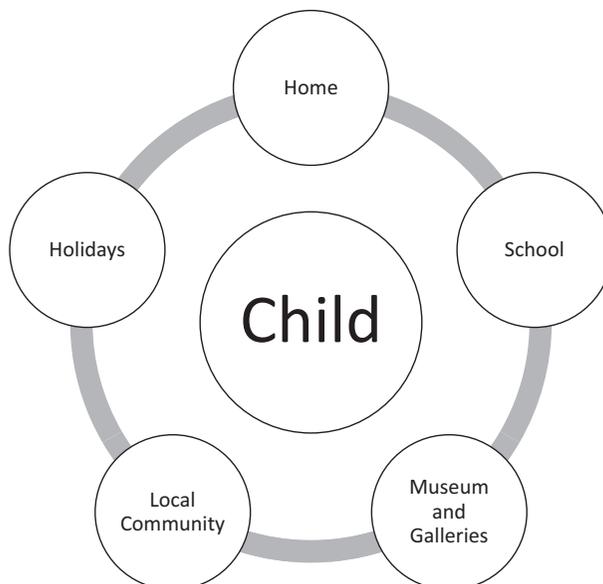
## Ethics

The research was approved by the authors' University Research Ethics Committee, and the local city council ethics representative. Informed consent was sought from all participants including the children (Hammersley, 2015) and their parents. Children were reminded that their participation was voluntary at the start of every session. To ensure anonymity, they were assigned aliases. In addition to this none of the photographs included photos of the children; they focused on their artwork and the activities. Consent was obtained from the children and the parents/caregivers to use the images produced by the children in publications.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The children each presented an individual range of visual art experiences, likes and dislikes as well as varying levels of cultural capital acquisition. Results have been presented in line with the two research questions.

In line with the literature, the children spoke of experiences which occurred at home, at school, in museums and galleries, and in the local community but, some also included examples from holidays. The earlier figure has therefore been amended to reflect this (Figure 5). The children primarily recounted experiences that occurred within their local world, with a distinction emerging between the locations of art-making activities and art-viewing activities. The two key places where art-making was dominant for the children were school and home with a distinction emerging between the way art was experienced in these two places (Haanstra, 2010). This distinction emerged through the discussions that occurred in relation to the art-making activities that the children took part in for the research. The children reflected on these activities, by contrasting it with the everyday experiences of the classroom. For example, after the art workshop in April Melissa said "...in school you get told what to do and we did get told what do here but it's not like, not oh you've got



**FIGURE 5** Visual art Domains

to do this...” whereas at school “...you have to do like, do like the same, like...a ...painting...like a Christmas card or something”. Further confirmation of this was also revealed in the photographs that the children selected to discuss in the photo-elicitation activity: Peter (see Image 4) selected an image of an art activity in school which focused on instructions, explaining the instructions they received and revealing the similarity of the output of each child. During the discussion of her collage, Maia said that “I also would like to be an artist but anyway some people are already calling me an artist cos I do a lot paintings and bring them in to school”. In the photo-elicitation activity she included a photo of a photo at home of herself as an artist saying “...So I just took a picture of this so I can remind myself and just to show everybody else”. What she omitted from the discussion was also interesting in that she did not volunteer to talk about art in school, rather focusing on what she created at home. Art-viewing activities seemed to occur in museums and galleries, the local community or on holiday.

### Visual art experiences at home and school

All the children from Year 4 talked about making art at home. For example, Edward “...can just like get inspiration like ‘Oh, oh! I wonder what I can draw?’ and then I can just go on YouTube or like a website and you can search something and then you just go ‘Oh!’ and can try and paint that or draw it.” Maia took photos of her artworks (see Image 1) that she had made at home describing the process in one photo as “I did it from my...just my memory cos I through trees and then I thought draw...Cos with trees I can draw with blossoms, with hills, pears, I don't know if pears grow on trees...”.



**FIGURE IMAGE 1** Artwork by Maia (Robb, 2019)

Clara stated that “An [sic] all the time...when I’m not like watching TV, I’m going to be drawing and painting” while Jake said that if he wants to do art at home he will “...just ask my Mum and then she lets me...”. Painting at home for Jake consisted of “painting board”.

In School B, of the older age group (Year 6), Amy presented in detail, through her words and images, as a keen crafter (see Image 2). In the first meeting she stated that “Ehm I make like Hamma beads and loom bands and then I make cards for people's birthdays and Christmas”. She also received a regular subscription of a craft magazine for children, highlighting a photo showing what she had made from it: “...lots of collages...I’ve made like a mermaid one and a gecko one and I made this little thing with a balloon...”.



**FIGURE IMAGE 2** A photograph of Amy's craftwork (Robb, 2019)

Although Peter did not describe art making at home he did provide an example of making art at his grandparent's house: "We used to graffiti on, you know the blue things that used to go over stuff, we put that down and then we got big cardboards bits and then we sprayed whatever we wanted to do". Dan described art-making activities inspired by street art: "I've taken some pictures like and windows where there's shade and I've spray painted, cutted [sic] it out and spray painted a different colour and where there's light I've spray painted it with another colour". Neither Andrew nor Melissa in School A described art-making activities in the home.

Art-making experiences in school were referred to by all the children at some point during the data-gathering process though this was done to varying degrees. In School A, all the children talked positively about these experiences however Edward felt that they did not receive art lessons often and if they did, they were related to a class project: as Edward stated "But it's like very, very rare cos it's only for our topic really. Or like for Valentine's Cards or Christmas Cards or Birthday Cards. Or not Birthday Cards. I forgot!". Both Andrew and Jake made statements that indicated that the amount of art provision they received would depend on the teacher they had. For example, Jake stated that they received art "Like once a week? But with X we done it two every week". Andrew identified a teacher who "...likes art...And he likes a lot of stuff and in art he done loads of art with us...". Melissa described a range of art lessons that she had completed in school; she felt that they provided a contrast with the other subjects because they were "...boring cos you don't get to talk to anyone, even though we always talk, but you're not allowed to...like you really like art and you're allowed to talk and it's just like...fun...". However, the sense of freedom that the children experienced in these lessons contrasted with their descriptions of the lessons which seemed to rely on instructions and tools, led by the

teacher (Greenwood, 2011). Melissa described using a “template” and Andrew said that he would like to do art in school “...that you don’t need to do something you get told to do, you just do it”.

The issues raised in relation to art in school, also emerged in the words of the children in School B. For example, Clara stated that art in school was not a regular occurrence: “Ehm I hardly do art at school... We used to do it every... Usually there’s only instructions with things that you really need to do correctly, cos this, this is, there’s no wrong way and no right way [referring to the collage]” (see Image 3).



**FIGURE IMAGE 3** Clara’s collage (Robb, 2019)

Peter commented on the contrast too, stating “...we don’t usually do stuff like that in a normal class cos we do like, like, we do...yeah, sunsets and that, that’s what we do yeah”. In his words and pictures he also drew attention to how art lessons were linked to class projects and would involve the use of templates (see Image 4).



**FIGURE IMAGE 4** Peter's photograph of art in school (Robb, 2019)

The other three children at School B portrayed themselves as artists, Maia, Amy and Dan, however they made little reference to school visual art experiences; their meaningful art-making experiences appeared to occur at home (See Image 1 for Maia's artwork). When asked about school art experiences, Maia could recall some school art activities but the details were scant and these examples were only volunteered when prompted. Amy also never mentioned any school experiences in relation to this subject, except on one occasion when she compared the experiences she had during the data gathering period with those of a school art lesson saying: "Eh I liked it and it was really fun because we don't usually do stuff like this...Because usually we just do drawings and then a little bit of painting." For Dan art in school was only mentioned in general terms. Those lessons are "...fun...not very fun but can be fun. Depends what you're doing". While these children did mention art activities in school, when asked, their recounts of visual art experiences in their own homes were more complete. They became experts of their world, explaining how to do certain techniques, talking through the art processes, or providing information in relation to procuring art materials in the city.

### **Visual art experiences in the local community, museums and galleries and on holiday**

In terms of art making in the local community, Maia was the only participant to provide an example; she attended a local art club where "...usually just go there to paint but it starts at 7 o'clock and ends at 9 o'clock and at 8 o'clock you get a little break time like have some cookies and some milk". The other children all primarily focused on art-viewing experiences in the local community and the local municipal art gallery in particular. Peter stated that "...every week we go to [the gallery] as well...my

Mum's favourite one's the Highland Cow cos she likes them...". Melissa also described repeat visits stating "...when you first go there it's fun but when you keep on going and going and going it just gets boring cos you know like everything in there." Of the gallery, Dan said "It's not very much my cup of tea...It's a bit boring". Clara was a frequent visitor describing one of the rooms in the gallery as having "...loads of old paintings and...just nothing we would kind of do now...like Georgian and Victoria stuff". Edward described the gallery in positive terms stating "I only just go into my most favourite room and look at my most favourite things". Andrew described it as "Yeah cos that's like famous art. You know like, if you see like, art from a famous museum, you would see art by a really famous artist but famous art like they've took time and that..." The gallery is free throughout and situated in the middle of the town centre. Noticeably the enthusiasm for the gallery is demonstrated by the young children in these examples and not the older children though neither Jake nor Maia made significant references to the gallery.

Other than the local gallery, the children identified examples of street art and public art in their photographs. The appeal of these examples leaned towards the aesthetic. Andrew described a street art example saying "I know this was meant. It was at a surgery, doctors at, in [local area] and it's there... It's cool cos like streets and buildings cos they're old and grey, put paintings on it, makes it nice and colourful and that" (see Image 5).



**FIGURE IMAGE 5** Andrew's photograph of street art (Robb, 2019)

Peter described street art in the town centre stating "I think it's good. There's graffiti in the town centre...it's basically painting but it's in the streets". Jake and Edward presented photographs of a local public sculpture however Edward described it as architecture and Jake talks about playing on it: "... if you look through them it looks cool and it then looks like there's two eyes and I live near this and sometimes I climb it for fun" (see Image 6).

These four boys attached stories to these examples which demonstrated an enthusiasm for the experience in a way that was missing when providing examples of visits to museums and galleries. In terms of viewing contemporary art examples, only Melissa had visited the local contemporary art centre. When asked why they had not visited, Peter volunteered that it was because his Mum did not know where it was.



**FIGURE IMAGE 6** Sculpture, image taken by Jake (Robb, 2019)

Some of the participants discussed visual art experiences while on holiday. Clara for example stated that “When I was in Washington my hotel room looked right onto the White House so I got to landscape the trees around it.” Melissa had visited a number of places in Europe on holiday and a number of her photographs were of a trip to Berlin, which took place while she had the camera. She was quite critical of the city however describing it as “...quite good but there wasn't really anything exciting” and that “All the museums were boring”. Andrew described watching a street caricaturist completing a drawing of his sister and took a photo of some pottery painted in Ireland (see Image 7).



**FIGURE IMAGE 7** Examples of art from holiday, taken by Andrew (Robb, 2019)

## Summary

The participants all experienced visual art in school which means that in terms of engaging in visual art experiences, and acquiring cultural capital, the school environment plays a key role. For these children in comparison to other lessons, art was fun and free, however, the younger children indicated that they experienced even more freedom when they engaged in art activities in the home (Haanstra, 2010). The seeming irrelevance of school experience in relation to home experience for Maia, Amy and Dan, is also notable as they identified as artists. This would suggest in order to develop an engaged interest

in art, the home experience was valued more than the school experience. An explanation for this could be that the visual art experiences that they had in home bore little resemblance to their experiences in school; a key difference was that they were self-initiated (Bhroin, 2007; Haanstra, 2010; Richards, 2014; Rose et al., 2006) and that they had the freedom to pursue and explore in a way that was not highlighted in the words regarding the school experiences. In addition, there was a sense that these children were supported to pursue their interest in the visual art by their parents and carers; they had access to resources and would sometimes engage in art activities with their parents (Barrett et al., 2012; Crum, 2007; Rose et al., 2006; Tan & Gibson, 2017).

The children's experiences of art outside of the home and school also appeared to be mixed, particularly in relation to art-viewing, with some participants visiting art galleries during holidays while others' experiences appeared to be limited to the local municipal art gallery. Given that all children had experienced art in schools and, for some of the participants, this seemed to be the only place where they had the opportunity to regularly engage in art-making activities and art-viewing activities, the school experience appeared to be limited in range, and in particular, did not seem to be valued by those participants who considered themselves artists. This is concerning, as some children who may wish to develop an interest in visual art may have extremely limited opportunities to do so depending on the adults in their lives both at home and at school. This issue will be explored further in the next section through the theoretical lens of cultural capital.

## THE IMPACT OF CULTURAL CAPITAL ON THE CHILDREN

Key to cultural capital acquisition by children is the relationship they have with the adults in their lives, and the value placed on the cultural capital that adult seeks to acquire. From the children's words regarding their experiences in school it would seem that the art experiences they received in class were dependent on the teacher that they had at that moment in time. This could mean therefore that the quality and frequency of experience would vary depending on the teacher. In this study, the adults who seemed most significant in determining whether a child had an interest in art or not were the parent and caregiver (Bourdieu, 1979, 1986).

Bourdieu (1979) outlines levels of cultural capital and value, however, it seemed that some of the children were at a stage where they were resistant to the control that cultural capital potentially could have on them. For example, Melissa (Year 6) gave a number of examples of cultural capital acquisition, viewing art in the city but also across Europe on holidays with her parents (see Image 8).



**FIGURE IMAGE 8** Berlin, taken by Melissa (Robb, 2019)

These experiences were not necessarily always welcomed and towards the end of the data gathering period Melissa admitted that “I don't really like paintings and stuff”. This was interesting in that she had given no indication of this prior to the final data gathering activity; it is impossible to know whether this had always been her opinion throughout the year of data gathering or whether this was a change in attitude and/or related to the developmental stage. Through the year she seemed to want to rebel from the adult expectations imposed on her. The acquired capital also did not seem to result in Melissa self-initiating art-making activities. Clara demonstrated a similar shift in attitude towards art during the year: at the start of the year she described making art instead of watching TV but at the last session she stated that she didn't “...really do art at home.” Both Melissa and Clara provided a number of examples of undertaking art activities through their parents that would be considered ‘high art’ (Bourdieu, 1979) and yet their interest waned during the year. It may be that it was their interest in taking part in the data gathering that waned rather than their interest in visual art, on the other hand, they perhaps felt more confident towards the end of the data gathering process to express these more negative opinions. It could be that their personal identity changed in response to how they wanted to be viewed by others. Or, in ten years’ time, they may return to these experiences with a more positive view.

Maia, in Year 4, and Amy in Year 6, who both stated that they were artists, appeared to have limited art experiences where cultural capital could be acquired, however, they engaged in a high level of self-initiated art activities and could discuss in some detail examples of art, particularly contemporary art, during art-viewing activities. These children derived joy and knowledge about visual art from their art-making experiences at home where they had the autonomy to explore materials and subjects in their own time, and the space to be curious.

As discussed by Kisida et al. (2014), it could be that lower levels of cultural capital, in lines with Bourdieu's theories (Bourdieu, 1979), are an advantage in terms of being a curious learner. This could then be taken a step further, with children creating their own structures of cultural capital, free from the constraints of traditional theory (Lizardo, 2016; Savage, 2015). This began to emerge during art-viewing activities when the children selected images of contemporary art and street art over images of traditional art genres to discuss, genres that according to Peter, were not included in the school curriculum. For this to happen, adults would need to reflect on how cultural capital has been socially-constructed in the world, contrast this with the child's experiences and then act by listening to children and responding through the introduction of a broader variety of visual art experiences.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the need for children to have the freedom to explore visual art on their own terms, the role of the adult is key in terms of access to the visual art experience, the quality of that visual art experience and how children value that experience. The children's words and perceptions indicated that while the school experience was a welcome, enjoyable contrast with other lessons, the experience at home was more valuable in that there was more freedom to explore and pursue their own curiosity in relation to art. This seemed to be more important than acquiring cultural capital through activities which would be linked to high art as defined by Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1979), and this was particularly noticeable when children discussed art-viewing experiences. While some children have these opportunities at home some do not, and it therefore is incumbent on schools to provide these for all children. Teachers and schools have a responsibility to ensure that the visual art curriculum is delivered effectively and that the quality of delivery supports the understanding and curiosity of the child.

The voices of children in relation to visual art experiences across the five domains of home, school, museum and galleries, the local community and holiday places have been absent till this point. This paper addresses this gap, as well as making significant contribution to the existing international body of literature published at least since 2005, the period covered by the systematic literature review. It provides a longitudinal perspective on cultural capital acquisition through visual art experiences that is missing from existing literature. This is further strengthened by the fact that a variety of perspectives are presented in this paper from children and families with varying experiences of visual art. They are therefore valuable for providing an insight into the breadth of experience for pupils, highlighting issues that teachers across the world could explore and reflect on in their own practice.

This study is limited by its small-scale nature, gathered in a specific context with a small number of participants. In addition, the focus of this study was on children's voices revealing their thoughts on art in their world and how this related to their self-identity. The study would be strengthened by listening to the significant adults' perspective providing valuable social context within which to situate the child's voice (Thomson, 2008). This combined with further social and demographic information for each participant would provide a deeper picture of the habitus and fields within which the children inhabit. There is therefore scope for further research, exploring these factors in more depth. A further recommendation for future research studies is the need for longitudinal studies, larger in scale to be undertaken. These studies could explore how children acquire, and use cultural capital, the nature of the inheritance of cultural capital as well as the role that education plays.

In terms of implications for practice and policy, the words and perceptions of the children highlight that there is significant scope for developing rich, autonomous visual art experiences in the primary classroom which develop visual art skills and understanding. This would require the teacher to reflect on their role as a supporter rather than a leader in the classroom, which in turn has resource and professional development implications. Rather than considering this in isolation though, the potential of using existing learning networks within cities and geographical regions, comprising of schools, cultural organisations and other institutions, as well as parents, to support the delivery of visual art education in schools should also be explored. Also, and most crucially, in order to provide experiences that are most relevant to the child, the adult must listen to and consider the child's perspective of their experiences of education, and in this case visual art education.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors thank the schools and the participants for their contributions to the research. Research data are not shared due to ethical restrictions.

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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**How to cite this article:** RobbA, Jindal-Snape D, Levy S. Art in my world: Exploring the visual art experiences in the everyday lives of young children and their impact on cultural capital. *Child Soc.* 2020;00:1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12392>