

NURTURING CARE THROUGH ARTMAKING: AN EXPLORATION OF THE ETHICS OF
CARE IN AN AFTERSCHOOL ART CLUB

by

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(Under the Direction of Lynn Sanders-Bustle)

ABSTRACT

Guided by and grounded in Nodding's (1984) ethics of care theory, this inquiry explored how caring relationships are nurtured between young learners and families through artmaking in an after-school art club led by local artists. Nine families, including parents, siblings, and young learners ages four and five, and I, a veteran art educator turned early childhood school director, employed an after-school art club I started, led by three local artists from our community. The Friday Art Club (FAC) was designed to understand more fully how collaborative artmaking can nurture caring relationships among adults and children. Each of the eight FAC sessions aimed to bring children and families together around artmaking to encourage creativity and caring practices such as dialogue, receptivity, and engrossment. Each FAC session was documented in its entirety using video ethnography methods. Data for the study included four video-cued interviews conducted with parent participants and field notes in the form of video footage. This data was then analyzed by employing reflexive thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022), which was a non-linear process that involved many layers of "systematic processes of data coding to develop themes" (p. 4). The analysis led to a rich understanding of the patterns and situated moments of participant experience. The production of the themes,

underpinned by ethics of care theory, led to the three main findings: Artmaking as a medium for engrossed and situated care, Strengthening circles and chains of care through artmaking, and Art as a tangible artifact for confirmations of care. Based on the findings, this research inquiry concludes that art is uniquely situated to nurture critical concepts of care. By integrating artmaking with care ethics and approaching artmaking experiences through a lens of care, spaces can be created where relationships flourish, nurturing people of all ages in significant and lasting ways and expanding the ripple effect of care outward.

INDEX WORDS: early-childhood, art education, ethics of care, engrossment, artmaking, video ethnography methods, Nel Noddings, reflexive thematic analysis

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Nick, whose humor, encouragement, and patience saw me through this. It is also dedicated to my children, Solon and Kaya, who inspired this inquiry from the beginning. Being your mom is my greatest joy.

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PROLOGUE

Time is how you spend your love—Nick Laird, Northern Irish novelist and poet

My journey into this research is deeply rooted in my role as a parent and began when my children, Solon (11) and Kaya (9), were very young. I was driven by my desire to provide them with quality time together through enriching arts experiences that would help them explore their local surroundings, comprehend the world around them, and ultimately bring our family closer together.

My master's thesis explored how visual arts can be integrated into home-based learning. My fascination with alternative educational approaches, divergent thinking, and innovative pedagogical methods, particularly beyond conventional classroom settings, has always been a driving force in my academic pursuits because alternative approaches can adapt to diverse learning styles, foster collaboration and communication skills, and often prioritize creativity.

Conventional classroom settings do not always adequately address the diverse learning styles and needs of all students. This can be for many reasons, including limited resources, loss of teacher autonomy, audit-driven culture, and large class sizes (Glanzer, 2013; Greenwalt, 2016). For this reason, alternative educational environments and approaches to education, like experiential, play-based, and community-based learning have gained attention for their ability to offer individualized, creative, and flexible learning opportunities. These learning environments foster deeper engagement by supporting diverse learner needs and adapting teaching methods to individual students within the context of their communities, thus ensuring that all students have opportunities to succeed. McClure (2011) articulated, "Site-oriented, negotiated practices are not

only promising in early childhood education but, along a spectrum of art educational contexts, may provide a route through which educators and children working together can disrupt the normalization of standardized or undetermined curricula” (p. 139). These approaches disrupt standardized curricula and serve as an alternative that allows educators and children to collaborate and explore learning the arts in diverse settings. Tredinnick-Kirby (2022) highlights the flaws of a one-size-fits-all educational system and advocates for both emergent learning and the ethics of care. She also explains how “the one-size-fits-all curricular approach disregards students’ lived experiences, their voices, and their agency in their own learning” (Tredinnick-Kirby, 2022, p. 6). These ideas prompted the eventual creation of the Friday Art Club (FAC), a program I designed for children and parents, led by local artists. The FAC is the focus of this dissertation.

Early on in my doctoral journey, I became captivated by the potential of children’s media and video to make art experiences more accessible to the public and transcend the confines of traditional learning environments. As an educator, I aspired to create accessible resources related to contemporary approaches in art education, focusing on local artists and fostering empathy within households and society. Simultaneously, as a mother, I yearned to embed caregiving within our families’ artistic endeavors, intertwining the nurturing process with creative expression.

Onset of COVID-19

However, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic during the spring 2020 semester of my third doctoral year marked a profound turning point. Soon after completing my comprehensive exams, I found myself embarking on a pilot study using video ethnography methods with my children and a local artist. However, the abrupt onset of shelter-in-place directives upended our

bustling routines and illuminated a stark realization: Despite advocating for the importance of art education within the home, I had neglected it within my own household.

During this time, we transformed the dining room table into the epicenter of our lives and my research endeavors. Piled with books, art supplies, and remnants of our daily lives, the table became the physical embodiment of our pandemic artmaking journey. Engaging in artmaking activities with my children became a way of intentionally connecting with them. By intentional, I mean that I approached the process and the time spent with them consciously and deliberately, focusing on active listening and mindful engagement. These actions are key elements of caregiving, as outlined by Noddings' ethics of care theory (1984), emphasizing the importance of being fully present and responsive in nurturing meaningful connections. Ironically, The COVID-19 hiatus, while not devoid of its challenges and tragedies, afforded us a precious opportunity to reconnect and prioritize intentional artmaking within our family dynamic. By embracing this newfound pause, I sought to instill in my children a profound sense of care, with art serving as our chosen love language. These shared artistic endeavors solidified my conviction about the transformative power of intentional artmaking, bridging generational divides and nurturing empathetic bonds through care.

Understanding Empathy and Attunement

I am thankful to have found Noddings' theory of care in my graduate studies, as it confirmed so many things I have felt and thought about as an educator and mother. I only wish I had known earlier about this theory and how it could be applied in all areas of life and education. Noddings (2013) aptly posits that witnessing genuine acts of care from adults is pivotal for young minds and shapes their understanding of empathy and attunement. She explains, "It is important for the young, in addition to being cared for, to see and assist in the genuine caring

done by adults” (p. xiv). Our shared experiences of artmaking during the pandemic underscored the importance of providing my children with a creative outlet for self-expression during tumultuous times and an opportunity for me to be present and attuned to their emotions while demonstrating care. It also underscored the pivotal role of community and interpersonal connections in fostering emotional resilience and well-being.

Reflecting on our collective passage through the pandemic by crafting fairy houses, experimenting with sun prints, and crafting uplifting posters for neighbors, the intersections of parenting, arts research, and caregiving emerged as more poignant and relevant than ever. This realization is echoed with Grumet’s (1988) assertion, “Theory grows where it is planted, soaking up the nutrients in the local soil, turning to the local light” (p. 14). These seemingly mundane moments served as reminders to refocus on what truly matters, illuminating the inherent interconnectedness between theory, research, and practice within the context of my own life and that of those around me.

Despite encountering unforeseen obstacles, including the persistent disruptions wrought by the pandemic, such as shelter in place, school closures, social distancing, remote work and learning, and the disruption of social connections and community engagement, I remained steadfast in my commitment to advancing arts education for young learners and families. During this time, the FAC, which is shared in the forthcoming pages, was born from the necessity of adapting to evolving circumstances. While aspects of my original research plan may have changed, the enduring relationships forged, and experiences gained through making art together in this after-school FAC serve as invaluable catalysts for the future growth of both participants and the broader realm of arts education.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This research inquiry explored the dynamics of nurturing care through shared artmaking experiences among young learners and their families within the context of an after-school FAC under the guidance of local artists. Drawing on Noddings' ethics of care theory (1984), I aimed to illuminate how intentional artistic engagements can serve as a catalyst for fostering bonds of care through caring concepts such as attunement, engrossment, and engagement. It was anticipated that the knowledge generated from this inquiry would grant new insights and inform practices within the realm of art education. In my research I used qualitative video ethnography methodology to record the experiences of the participants in the Friday Art Club (FAC) which allowed me as the researcher and participants to revisit what occurred. Participants of this study included nine young learners from an early-childhood day school, along with their parents and family members. The three artists involved are not considered participants, per se, but were purposefully selected by me to guide the sessions and were an important aspect of the FAC experience.

Personal Interest and Contextual Background

As an educator, my top priority has always been to create a supportive environment for my students. In my art classroom, I aimed to provide a safe space where students can freely express themselves, explore art, and feel deeply valued. My teaching journey began at a Title 1 high school in Savannah, Georgia. There, I quickly realized that students needed both quality art education and intentional support from caring adults. This insight became even clearer when I

taught at a Turkish boarding school for children without fathers, as my role as a teacher played an even more significant role in my students' lives. This experience underscored the importance of creating nurturing environments in the art classroom and highlighted teachers' significant role in students' lives.

Transitioning to teaching in Tokyo, Japan, I found that while most students had stable home environments with caring adults, the need for nurturing care in the classroom remained paramount. Although I had not yet come across Noddings' ethics of care theory (1984), I grasped the essential principle that students must feel cared for to truly engage in meaningful learning, and the art classroom is uniquely situated to be a space to nurture care. The more students feel nurtured, the better prepared they are to immerse themselves in their educational journey and personal growth. Becoming a parent intensified this commitment, as the love I discovered for my children showed me the profound impact of engaging in art to express care and affection. I cherished the joy of bonding with my children through our shared creative activities.

Centering the Local

In recent years, I have also realized the importance of introducing my children to local artists and the educational value of focusing on artists within one's community. Research has shown that place-based approaches can significantly benefit young children (Graham, 2007; Gruenewald, 2003; Marshall, 2011; McClure, 2011). However, seeking to create a "curriculum" around local artists for my children and me, I struggled to find resources centered on local and contemporary artists or where to start. However, I knew it was crucial to go beyond simply meeting the artists.

Lippard (1997) encourages readers to adopt a new, responsible way of perceiving both place and art, asking them to consider the possibilities that emerge from this perspective. She

emphasizes the importance of appreciating differences, understanding context, and developing the ability to make critical, comparative judgments rooted in empathy and evidence (p. 20). This reflective approach promotes a deeper, more responsible engagement with both art and the environments in which it is created and experienced. Lippard's call for a responsible perception of place through empathy and understanding resonated with my desire to connect more fully with our creative community. Lippard's prompting confirmed my desire to engage with local artists, nurture creative experiences, and strengthen our bond with the place and people around us and with each other. I wondered, could acts of care through artmaking nurture more empathy and build stronger communities?

As an art educator and a parent, I wanted to think more deeply about the nature of care. Noddings (2012) emphasized the importance of concepts such as listening, dialogue, and engrossment in nurturing caring relations. She suggested that anyone in the role of caregiver needs to consider "the central elements in establishing and maintaining relations of care and trust, which include listening, dialogue, critical thinking, reflective response, and making thoughtful connections among the disciplines and to life itself" (p. 771). There are many connections between establishing and maintaining relations of care through the discipline of art education and intentional, collaborative artmaking experiences. Noddings (1984/2013) explained that in order "to confirm another, we must know and understand that other's reality" (p. xix). Noddings' concept of confirmation aligns with collaborative artmaking guided by local artists and serves as an avenue toward confirmation, listening, and engagement across communities. By engaging in creative experiences guided by the local creative community, students and families have opportunities to express themselves while learning new skills and having opportunities to understand and appreciate the perspectives and realities of others. This process nurtures a sense

of connection, empathy, and mutual respect among all participants, and making art together encourages active engagement and meaningful engrossment.

Community-Based Art Education (CBAE)

Collaborative art experiences and dialogue are vital for both young learners and adults as part of a larger community. Although this inquiry might not be considered community-based art education, I draw from numerous community-based art education (CBAE) principles and commitments related to the importance of social interaction through artmaking. CBAE fosters dialogue and learning through meaningful activities outside of formal settings such as schools and museums. The FAC that was central to this inquiry was designed with the understanding that collaboration in community settings is essential to expand visual arts learning experiences and dialogue while building a community across age groups to include family as well as other community members. Lawton et al. (2019) affirmed that CBAE “fosters a means for intergenerational discourse and learning through ideas that matter,” making activities and interactions between adults, families, children, and community artists of different ages relevant (p. 2).

Another commitment that aligns with CBAE is connecting young learners, families, and community members through art experiences with people they might not otherwise know offering opportunities for participants to "connect, collaborate, and create through art-based activity that is asset-centered; listen to the stories of others to learn and build more inclusive and equitable communities and practices” (Lawton et al., 2019, p. 3). In the case of the FAC, many families did not know many or any local artists or where to seek out art classes or resources. Through enabling these artmaking experiences, families and children could connect with the artists and other families in their school, tapping into the resources and talent in their community.

The FAC was asset centered, as it identified three talented artists within the community who could guide learning by highlighting their strengths, skills, and experiences. An asset approach also acknowledged each participant's experience and agency in their learning journey (Blatt-Gross, 2023; Lawton et al., 2019).

Finally, CBAE aligns with my focus of creating a space for the flourishing and infusion of care, artmaking, and social-emotional learning. Blatt-Gross (2023) found from her research into CBAE that, "The outcomes have additional implications for the creation of inclusive academic environments, specifically through the use of collaborative processes that facilitate the development of empathy and dialogic practices (p. 16). In this light, CBAE becomes a natural extension of care theory, promoting and building upon critical concepts in Noddings (1984) care framework. CBAE is a powerful pedagogical tool to nurture care, provide intentional space, and enhance more engaged learning outcomes.

Meaning of Intentionality in this Inquiry

In the context of this inquiry, intentionality refers to the purposeful and deliberate actions taken to nurture caring relationships and meaningful engagement through artmaking. Although Noddings (2002) does not explicitly use the term "intentionality", in *Starting at Home: Caring and Social Policy*, her emphasis on deliberate, responsive care provides a framework for understanding how intentionality functions in relational contexts. Noddings argues that care is not accidental or an abstract principle but is a lived experience that manifests in concrete everyday actions and choices to the needs of others. This reflects a core principle of this research: the intentional design of art experiences that nurture connection. Similarly, John Dewey's (1938) philosophy of education highlights the importance of intentional experiences in promoting growth and meaningful learning, experiences that all can contribute towards.

However, I cannot speak to whether the participants approached the FAC with intentionality, yet from my perspective as the researcher and designer of the FAC, the artmaking parallels Dewey's focus on experiential learning parallels how artmaking is an intentional act, where the creative activities were designed to facilitate deeper relationships among children and families.

Carol Gilligan's (1982) work on relational ethics further underscores the idea that care and connection are not accidental but result from conscious, relationally attuned actions. This emphasis on intentional relationships aligns with the Reggio Emilia approach (Edwards et al., 2011), where environments and learning opportunities support children's development and foster community through shared experiences. In this inquiry, intentionality manifests as the deliberate structuring of space, activities, and interactions to create opportunities for caring concepts such as reciprocity, confirmation, engrossment, attunement, and engagement among participants, all of which will be discussed in the following pages. Through these intentional efforts, I hoped that the FAC would become a space where creative expression and care ethics were intertwined, fostering a network of care that extends beyond the individual to encompass families and the broader community.

Problem Statement

This research addresses several significant gaps in the literature on art education and the role of care in fostering relationships. Further investigation is needed to better understand how shared artmaking experiences contribute to the development of caring relationships. While previous studies have shown the positive impact of art programs on families and young learners (McClure-Sweeney, 2019; Tredinnick-Kirby, 2022; Wright, 2012), more empirical evidence is necessary to understand how intentionally designed artmaking experiences- grounded in

nurturing caring concepts such as engagement, engrossment, and attunement- can be prioritized in art education to nurture meaningful connections and personal growth.

Although there is a growing body of literature advocating for an ethics of care approach in education (Bostow et al., 2015; Noddings, 1984, 2003) and in art education (Tredinnick-Kirby, 2022), more research and examples that focus on the implementation and importance of an ethics of care in the context of art education would be beneficial. This study seeks to explore the application of an ethics of care framework in art education to understand its potential to create supportive and nurturing learning environments that facilitate individual well-being and development, relational connections, and stronger communities.

Statement of Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study was to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of art education in nurturing caring relationships and facilitating both the personal growth of individuals and the collective development of stronger, caring bonds within families and communities. By exploring collaborative artmaking experiences between families and local artists, it was anticipated that educators, caregivers, and community organizers would gain insight into how collaborative artmaking practices can foster the development of deeper bonds and a heightened sense of care as people work, create, and learn together within the context of their community's artistic landscape. To shed light on this, the following research question is addressed: How are caring relationships nurtured among young learners and families through artmaking with local artists in an after-school art club?

Overview of the Research Approach

With approval from the University of Georgia's institutional review board (IRB), I conducted research on the experiences of nine young learners and their families within an after-

school FAC that I created and facilitated. The young learners and their families were all enrolled at an early childhood day school in the community and opted in on joining the FAC. This inquiry employed interpretive qualitative research methods rooted in Noddings' ethics of care theory (1984).

Visual ethnography methods were used and proved beneficial in gathering a wide variety of rich data beyond verbal communication which was particularly valuable in understanding how caring relationships were nurtured. For example, videos, video stills, and photographs provided nuanced insights into the behaviors, experiences, and environment of the FAC by enhancing comprehension and enabling multiple revisits to experiences and facilitating a more comprehensive interpretation. Video-cued interviews, using video prompts, enhanced recall and engagement during interviews, leading to more authentic research outcomes.

Data obtained from the four video-cued interviews and the video recordings of the FAC sessions formed the foundation of the inquiry's findings. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym, and all interviews were recorded and transcribed. The findings were also supported by researcher's field notes. Reflexive thematic analysis identified recurring patterns and themes, with the flexibility to apply Noddings' ethics of care theory (1984) and engage in creative thinking. Reflexive thematic analysis also allowed for careful coding and systematic engagement while providing room for imaginative interpretation.

Myself as the Researcher

At the time of this inquiry, my role was multifaceted. I was both the director of the Day School and an art education instructor at the University of Georgia as part of my Ph.D. assistantship. As a white, cisgendered female married to a white cisgender male, I am mindful of how my identity shapes my interactions and perceptions. Similarly, being middle-class grants my

family certain privileges, such as access to basic necessities. These personal attributes influenced my research approach, where I am cognizant that my assumptions about young learners and families may not align with others' views.

Consequently, when suggesting improvements, I endeavor to consider families' challenges with fewer resources. Drawing from my experiences as a mother and arts educator, I emphasize the importance of equitable access to quality arts education in my research endeavors. Furthermore, I make a concerted effort to acknowledge and confront my assumptions during data analysis and reflection on participant experiences. By integrating the significance of arts education into my research, I aim to foster a more comprehensive understanding of its impact on children's and families' lives.

Rationale and Significance

According to Khullar (2024), "The Harvard Study of Adult Development has found, over eight decades, that human connections may be the single most important factor in long-term happiness and health" (p. 16). The motivation behind this inquiry stems from my aspiration to nurture these strong connections crucial to happiness, health, and caring relationships- not only within families but among individuals across the community- through shared artmaking experiences and learning opportunities guided by local artists. I believe that artmaking is situated in a unique position to nurture these connections. Through intentionally designed creative activities, artmaking has the potential to nurture a heightened sense of care, promoting growth not only for individuals and families but as part of a broader, relational experience.

Additionally, there is a keen interest in understanding how intentional artmaking nurtures caring relationships and holistic growth, providing insights for educators and families to integrate these practices into their daily lives. By delving into how artmaking nurtures concepts

of care, this research contributes to developing future curricula and programs by empowering educators to incorporate such knowledge into their teaching methods and interactions with students and families. Furthermore, it opens avenues for expanding programs beyond traditional school settings, advocating for community-based art initiatives that prioritize lifelong learning alongside local artists. This approach fosters connection and collaboration and nurtures a culture of care within the broader community.

Definitions of Key Terminology

Attunement—According to Noddings (1984), at its core, attunement involves a deep and empathetic connection between individuals, where one person is attuned to the needs, feelings, and experiences of another person. Attunement emphasizes the importance of empathetic connection and responsiveness in caring relationships, particularly in educational settings where the well-being and growth of students is most important (Noddings, 1984, 1992, 2002, 2011).

Care—It is impossible to have one singular definition of care. However, in this inquiry, I look to Noddings’ conception of care that emphasizes the importance of relationality, empathy, and responsiveness in fostering ethical and compassionate relationships within personal interactions and within broader social contexts. It underscores the significance of caring relationships in promoting the well-being and flourishing of individuals and communities.

Community-Based Art Education—Lawton et al. (2019) define community-based art education as an approach that prioritizes collaboration between artists, educators, and community members to create and engage with art within a specific community.

Engagement—There is not a singular definition of engagement, but Noddings’ conception of engagement is closely intertwined with her broader philosophy of care ethics. It emphasizes the active and committed involvement in caring relationships, grounded in empathy,

authenticity, and mutual respect. It also implies being fully present and invested in the experiences and relationships at hand (Noddings, 1984, 1992, 2002, 2005).

Engrossment—Noddings defines engrossment as a state of deep absorption, concentration, and involvement in an activity or experience. Engrossment occurs when individuals are fully engaged with what they are doing and fully immersed in the present moment (Noddings, 1984, 1992, 2002).

Friday Art Club (FAC)— I created the Friday Art Club (FAC) for the purpose of this research inquiry as a place young learners and families could come together to create art under the guidance of local artists.

Intentionality—In this inquiry, I refer to the *Oxford Reference*'s definition of intentionality as, "The property of an action that is performed deliberately rather than accidentally or without purpose" (Oxford, n.d.).

Local—In this inquiry, I use the term *local* to mean it relates to a particular area or region, and in this case, the town where the research participants and I live.

Receptivity—According to Noddings, receptivity involves being open, attentive, and empathetic to the experiences, needs, and perspectives of others. In Noddings' framework, receptivity complements responsiveness. While responsiveness involves actively engaging with others needs and concerns, receptivity emphasizes the importance of being open and receptive to receiving care and support from others as well. It involves being willing to listen, accept help, and acknowledge the caring gestures of others (Noddings, 1984, 1992, 2002, 2006).

Reflexivity—According to Noddings', reflexivity involves an ongoing process of self-awareness, self-examination, and critical reflection. Reflexivity involves commitment to ongoing learning at the individual level and within broader social contexts (Noddings, 1984, 1992, 2002).

Responsiveness—In the context of care ethics, responsiveness refers to the ability and willingness to engage with the needs and experiences of others attentively and empathetically. For Noddings, responsiveness is a fundamental aspect of caring because it demonstrates an active commitment to understanding and meeting the needs of others (Noddings, 1984, 1992, 2002, 2006).

Organization of this Dissertation

In Chapter 1, I begin by describing my personal interest and the contextual background of this research inquiry, and I discuss my problem statement, statement of purpose, research question, overview of my research approach, myself as the researcher, rationale and significance, and conclude with definitions of key terminology. Chapter 2 provides a thorough review of Noddings' ethics of care theory, the theoretical framework for this inquiry, as well as supporting educational frameworks. In Chapter 3, I describe my methodology, which is guided by video ethnography methods. This chapter also includes my background and positionality, description of the FAC, including the research site and participants, the research design, and data collection methods. Chapter 4 focuses on the analysis of the data and the utilization of reflexive thematic analysis, sharing the key patterns and themes that were located from the inquiry. Chapter 5 includes my discussion of the findings. Finally, Chapter 6 will conclude with a reflection and implications for art education and future research.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: NEL NODDINGS ETHICS OF CARE AND SUPPORTING EDUCATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

In Chapter 2, I present literature focusing on care ethicist Nel Noddings' foundational ideas concerning care. In doing so, I connect aspects of her ethics of care theory to the relational qualities of artmaking as a form of care between adults and children. Before presenting the design and vision of the FAC, which I do in Chapter 3, it is essential to clearly outline the theoretical foundations of this inquiry, as the ethics of care theory played a crucial role in shaping my research.

Specifically, I explore Noddings' concepts of engrossment, receptivity, and the caring ideal in depth. I also address concerns about care theory and analyze how these concerns influence this inquiry. Furthermore, I discuss additional educational frameworks which align with ethics of care and informed the pedagogical framework of the FAC. Finally, the significance of care and artmaking in early childhood settings is discussed, focusing on creating opportunities to connect children and families through art activities.

Nel Noddings' Ethics of Care

Nel Noddings (1929–2022) was a significant scholar and a prominent educational theorist who contributed to the fields of philosophy, education, feminism, social psychology, and equity (Lake, 2012; Tredinnick-Kirby, 2022). She is well-known for her work on the philosophy and practice of care in both the home and formal educational settings. Together, Noddings and Carol Gilligan pioneered care ethics as a normative moral theory and approach to philosophy in the

early 1980s, and both played essential roles in the development and growth of care ethics. Much of Gilligan's work challenged traditional ethical theories and focused on the value and importance of care in moral reasoning and development (Gilligan, 1982). Much of Noddings' work focused on the value of caring relationships and the importance of empathy and caring for others, particularly in education. Both were critical of male-centered ethical theories, which emphasized justice and principles, often overlooking or marginalizing women's experiences and voices. However, each had a distinct approach and perspective to the ethics of care. Noddings' work focused on the interconnectedness of individuals and how moral decision-making is often rooted in the context of relationships, while Gilligan's work explored more extensively the differences between the relational aspects of moral thinking (more associated with women) and how it differed from more justice-centered moral thinking (more often associated with men).

Tredinnick-Kirby (2022) explains how "ethics, the philosophical study of morality, has for the most part concentrated on moral reasoning . . . and Noddings' ethics of care recasts ethics from such dominant models of moral reasoning to focus instead on human relationships" (p. 20). The focus on and prioritization of relationships and empathy in ethical decision-making with others sets Noddings' theory of an ethics of care apart from those that focus on moral reasoning for decision-making; the significant difference is that an ethic of care places its foundation in relations (Noddings, 2013; Smith, 2020, Tredinnick-Kirby, 2022). When it comes to caring, most people will readily agree that "caring" is something we should be concerned with and benefit from. Where this agreement usually dissipates, however, is on the question of how care is defined. One might ask, is it possible to define care, and if so, why should one attend to it?

In this chapter, I will attempt to unpack this question using Noddings as a guiding theorist for my discussion. Here, I start from a foundational understanding that caring is rooted in

genuine concern for the well-being of others. Noddings (1984) asserted that we should care about caring not only because it is the foundation of morality but that “as human beings, we want to care and to be cared for. *Caring* is important in itself” (p. 7). I agree with Noddings that we all want to care and be cared for and that caring and relatedness are essential to our lives. However, this inquiry was not focused on arguing the different aspects of ethics and care theory; rather, this inquiry is concerned with understanding further how an ethics of care theory, or theory of care, might inform education and pedagogy, specifically in approaching artmaking as a form of care and catalyst for relational experiences. Even though this inquiry was not specifically interested in ethical arguments and moral education, it was very much concerned with how we should meet and treat one another and how artmaking, when it is approached as a form of care, can establish, maintain, and enhance caring relations (Noddings, 1984).

In education, Noddings’ theory of care emphasizes the importance of relationships, compassion, and empathy in the educational process (Noddings, 1984, 2013; Smith, 2020; Tredinnick-Kirby, 2022). I use the term “education” broadly with the belief that education and learning are not limited to formal school spaces but are experiential and can take place in all areas of life, such as the home, in one’s community, and everyday interactions with those around us. Zena Tredinnick-Kirby (2022), an art educator and mother who has conducted extensive research into Noddings’ care theory and its application to homeschooling and art education pedagogy, explains how John Dewey’s theory of experience influenced Noddings’ theory of care. Like Dewey, “Noddings maintains that education should center on human experience” (Tredinnick-Kirby, p. 20). I align with Dewey’s (1934/1984/2002) assertion that students learn through doing (experiencing) and Noddings’ (1984, 2013) argument that if we want to educate children in care, they must have experience with both caring and being cared for. Noddings

advocated for a more holistic approach to education, which included emotional and ethical components, a break away from traditional educational theories focused on cognitive development.

With these understandings, I propose that care is a form of experiential learning and that making art together creates relational caring opportunities through such experiences. Therefore, artmaking provides a valuable space for nurturing relationships and expanding one's capacity to care. While learning about art and engaging in art making are essential parts of this inquiry, the relational experiential nature of artmaking, and its potential to foster care, is of greater significance to this study.

To care for others and to be cared for are complicated matters, as caring can often be quite difficult and complex. The etymological definition of care is to “be anxious or solicitous; grieve; feel concern or interest . . . to lament, to care, to sorrow, complain” (etymonline, n.d.), highlighting the emotional weight that often comes with caring. Caring can become burdensome when the boundaries of our responsibilities are unclear, and we are uncertain about what the right action is, especially for the one-caring. Yet despite its complexity and challenges, it remains essential, both as educators and as human beings, to explore, discuss, and understand the foundations of care, so that we can know how to better care for ourselves and those around us.

Caring relations in teaching and education and the conditions that enable and prohibit them have been researched and discussed by many (Gilligan, 1982; Grumet, 1988; Hanawalt, 2020; Held, 2005; Noddings, 1984, 1992; Owens & Ennis, 2005; Smith, 2020). However, although research is growing, further studies on how a theory of care can specifically inform artmaking and approaches to art education are not widely available. Therefore, as an extension to the significance of this study, this inquiry contributes to further thinking about how a theory of

care can inform art education, as it is my contention that artmaking is uniquely situated to allow for caring relationships to create rich opportunities for engrossment and receptivity.

Relationality

Noddings, who published the first edition of *Caring* in 1984, aimed to centralize women's experiences in care ethics. She explained (2013) how hardly anyone reacted positively to using the word feminine in the original title of *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* and replaced the word feminine with relational. I will discuss concerns with the centralization of women and the use of the word feminine later in this chapter, but for now, I would like to call attention to the word relational, which I use often. Merriam-Webster (2024) defined the word relational as “of or relating to kinship” and “characterized or constituted by relations.” Similarly, the entomological definition of relational is “indicating or specifying some relation” (etymonline, n.d.). In theorizations of care, most scholars place the relations between people as more fundamental than the individual and view persons as interdependent (Held, 2005; Noddings, 2013). Noddings (1984) specifically argued that “my very individuality is defined in a set of relations. This is my basic reality” (p. 51).

As an art educator, I have experienced firsthand the nurturing of relationships and the building of new ones when people make art together, as well as the joy that can result from caring for students. Gilligan (1982) spoke to the active, relational nature of care in that “the ideal of care is thus an activity of relationship, of seeing and responding to need, taking care of the world by sustaining the web of connection so that no one is left alone” (p. 62). In caring, the focus is on attentiveness and trust, on seeing a need and actively responding to it if able, and the recognition that our interests (as the one-caring and the cared-for) are not competing but are intertwined (Held, 2005). Caring is an active and intentional process, and the actions one takes

depend on the context of the situation. The process and act of caring are both emotional and practical. Noddings (1984) supported this active cultivation of caring relations, agreeing when she writes, “The source of my obligation is the value I place on the relatedness of caring. This value itself arises as a product of actual caring and being cared-for and my reflection on the goodness of these concrete caring situations” (p. 84).

Unlike other dominant moral theories, theorists of care ethics, such as Noddings and Held (2005), recognize that not all relationships are entered into voluntarily. For example, in a relationship between parent and child, teacher and child, etc., the child does not enter the relationship voluntarily. Held (2005) states, “The ethics of care . . . does not assume that relations relevant for morality have been entered into voluntarily by free and equal individuals as do dominant moral theories” (p. 46). This recognition is of the utmost importance in approaching research with children and how these relationships should be treated respectfully. As Noddings (2013) so aptly reminds us, “Persons as individuals are formed in relation” (p. iii). I am formed by the relationships with my children, just as their relationship with me forms them. Just as art is formed, relationships and the nature of care are always taking on new forms. However, the power within these relationships is fluid and unequal, which must be accounted for. It is the same with teacher and student, researcher and participant; we are all connected, but the power structures in the “one-caring” and the “cared-for” are not the same.

The One-Caring and the Cared-For

In Noddings’ effort to highlight the significance of human connection and relationships, she explores the dynamics between the roles of the one-caring and the cared-for. Understanding this dynamic is essential in laying the groundwork for caring relations as part of this inquiry. The one-caring refers to the person concerned or responsible for the well-being of the cared-for, such

as a parent, educator, or caregiver in the relationship. The cared-for refers to the individual receiving care, education, etc., such as a child or a student (Noddings, 1984, 2002, 2013). Even though Noddings delineated these two roles, she argued that caring is not and should not be a one-way street, rather, caring is a reciprocal relationship where the one-caring and the cared-for gain from their interactions. Noddings (1984) posits that “each of us is dependent upon the other in caring and moral relationships” (p. 48).

Similarly, Held (2005) in her discussion of justice and care clarifies that “an ethic of care sees the interests of carers and cared-for as importantly intertwined rather than as simply competing . . . care fosters social bonds” (p. 15). Although the directional nature of care moves outward from the one-caring toward the cared-for, caring is a two-way process and is reciprocal in nature. Noddings (2002) posits that for a relation or encounter to be one of care, “reception of A’s caring (the one-caring) by B (the cared-for) completes the relation” (p. 19). The response, or reciprocity, from the cared-for will shift depending on the situation and the relationship. As I mentioned, the power structures, especially between parent and child or teacher and student, are unequal as mutuality is impossible.

Despite this asymmetric nature, there is still reciprocity, and the cared-for offers something essential to the dynamic (Noddings, 2002). When B recognizes or responds to the care they receive from A, in some way, this acknowledgement provides the intrinsic reward for the one-caring. This sense of reciprocity, the intrinsic reward, is often what sustains parents, teachers, and caregivers, encouraging them to continue caring. I agree with Noddings on the importance of this intrinsic reward, as my experiences as a mother and teacher have confirmed its significance. Still, it seems dubious and somewhat elusive to say that care can only be completed if B accepts or recognizes A’s care, and there has been discussion on whether care can

be claimed when rejected. Despite this elusiveness and my mixed feelings, I concede that caring and its development occur through receptive engagement with others.

Circles and Chains: Natural and Ethical Caring

According to Noddings, each person is in both concentric circles and chains of care (Noddings, 1984). Each person is at the center of their concentric circle, and in our innermost circle, natural care, or care because we want to, is the primary mode. Natural caring is care that is motivated by love and inclination, or “we love not because we are required to love but because our natural relatedness gives natural birth to love. It is this love, this natural caring, that makes the ethical possible” (Noddings, 2013, p. 43). For example, as a mother, my children are in my innermost circle and so I care not only because I should but because I want to. As Noddings (1984) argued,

In situations where we act on behalf of the other because we want to do so, we are acting in accord with natural caring. A mother’s caretaking efforts in behalf of her child are not usually considered ethical but natural. (p. 79)

Noddings (1984) argues that morality as an “active virtue” requires two sentiments: the first being natural care and the second ethical care, and that there cannot be ethical care without the enabling sentiment of natural care (p. 79). I don’t believe Noddings is suggesting that people are not able to develop the capacity to love and care for others if they were not genuinely cared for in their youth, but that the experiences of natural care enable and give a more significant chance for the existence of ethical care. This is why it is so vital for children to not only experience natural/genuine care from the adults in their lives but also to be a part of it.

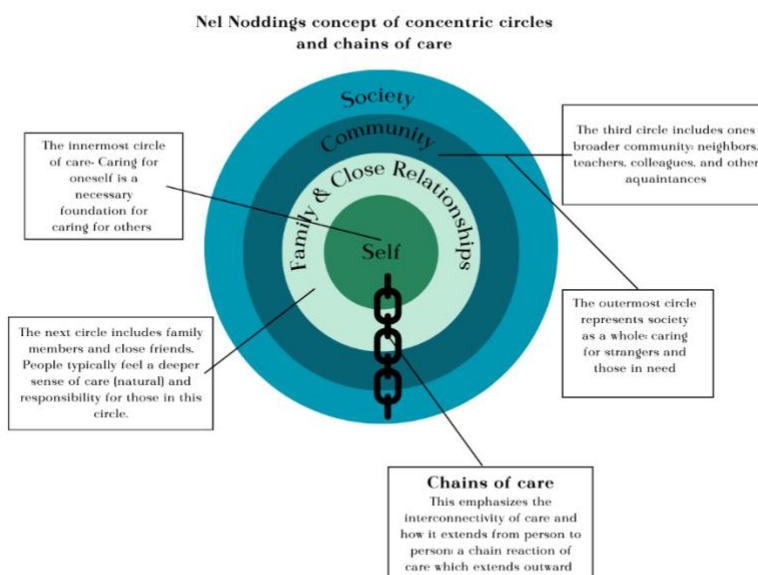
Starting from the initial place of natural care, I visualize the concentric circles of care as being like the work of Russian artist Wassily Kandinsky. He argued that in painting, “everything

starts from a dot” and for a modernist artist, circles (or dots) represented ideas of renewal, progress, and transformation (Lesso, 2022). Just as Kandinsky believed that any line or shape could be created from the starting point of a dot, one can visualize the growth and spread of concentric circles of care and, with them, the chains of care that extend to others.

Noddings asserts that natural caring gives ethical caring its foundation and strength, and we turn to ethical caring when natural caring fails or cannot be mustered (Noddings, 2013). As one moves outward from their innermost circle, they are more likely to move away from natural caring and toward ethical caring. However, despite this move from natural to ethical, care chains are linked through these circles and extend outward to those we do not yet know. Caring is situated differently depending on where it is in the circle and the connection between the one-caring and cared-for, as “every human situation is unique by virtue of differences in the participants” (Noddings, 2002, p. 20).

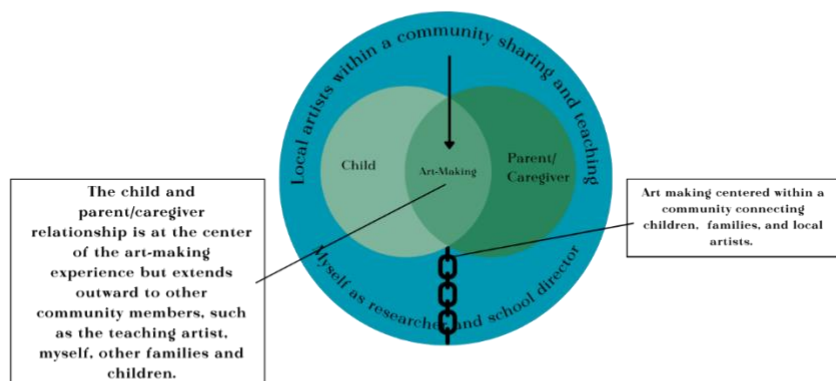
Noddings’ (2013) argues here is that natural caring is crucial to the extension of ethical chains of care in our society boldly claiming, “It is not an exaggeration to say that relations of natural caring are treasured in every facet of human life . . . natural caring is the cherished condition” (p. xvi). Ethical caring aims to revive or restore caring relations when natural caring falters or cannot be called upon. The criticality of natural caring as a foundation of ethical caring is why it is crucial for children to not only experience but be a part of genuine caring provided by adults. Noddings (2013) insists

This is why the real stuff of childhood experience must be so closely guided in caring relations. Memories of being cared for and reflections on such care constitute the early material of the ideal. Then, as the child learns to care for others, new memories are added to the developing ideal. (p. xvii)

Figure 1*Nel Noddings' Concept of Concentric Circles and Chains of Care*

Note. A visual map I created to conceptualize Noddings' theorization of circles and chains and the directional nature of care.

As shown in Figure 1, the interconnectivity of care and how it extends from person to person is why Noddings advocated that the primary aim of all education, both in the home and in school, should be nurturing care and the caring ideal from the earliest of ages. As one strives to expand a caring ethic outward from the self, it encompasses and grows into wider circles. A caring ethic has the potential to expand outward to encompass and grow into wider surfaces. When individuals experience care and compassion from others, they are better prepared to extend that care to others, ultimately promoting a chain comprised of a more interconnected community and caring society (Held, 2005; Noddings, 2002). I suggest that one avenue toward how these chain reactions of care can happen is through making art with others.

Figure 2*Initial Mapping/Understanding of the Inquiry Design*

Note. A visual map created to conceptualize the initial inquiry design.

The concept of concentric circles was also integral in the design of this inquiry. As is shown in Figure 2, my perceived understanding of the initial inquiry is centered around the relational experience of children and caregivers making art together and how making art with others can extend chains of care in a community. The interconnected circle extends with the intentional insertion of local artists to inform or lead the artmaking experience based on the artist's practice, in that when working with the artist, it could enrich the family/child artmaking dynamic, as well as create new chains of connections in the community.

My hope was that the families, children, and artists participating would get to know each other and form new relationships and chains of care within the community that were centered around artmaking. Therefore, forms of natural and ethical care are present in this inquiry, as care

and responsibility are situated differently depending on the person and their relationship. In caring relationships, responsibility arises from the recognition of another's needs. The caregiver feels a moral obligation to respond to these needs, not out of duty or external rules, but from a genuine concern for the well-being of the other person.

Tredinnick-Kirby (2022) spoke to this situatedness within her study when she explained how “one cannot disconnect the fact that I am my children’s mother; therefore, care was situated differently in my study of our art residency (with her children) than with students in a classroom” (p. 25). The relational experiences between parent/child will differ from between the child/artist, artist/parent, or participants/myself. The artists are situated as makers and teachers who share their artmaking process; this is a form of care, as they have chosen to act on behalf of a present other. However, it is not for me to say if this stems from a natural or ethical inclination.

For myself, this inquiry grew from my experiences of wanting “to be and remain related” to my children (Noddings, 1984, p. 83), which could occur often through artmaking together, a form of natural care. The chains of care extended outward to my community, and my roles as school director and educational researcher led me to want to provide intentional spaces for artmaking to extend further opportunities for engrossment, receptivity, and, ultimately, the caring ideal.

Engrossment and Receptivity

Just as relation, or relationality, is an essential quality of caring, so too are engrossment and receptivity. According to Noddings, engrossment is a state of absorbed engagement and attention when someone cares deeply about someone or something (Noddings, 1984, 2002, 2013). Engrossment is best described here as fully attentive to another by looking, listening, and feeling. I believe there is also an element of intentionality, of slowing down, to engrossment, a

characteristic that American philosopher and care theorist Milton Mayeroff also spoke of. Mayeroff (1990) discussed the intentional attitude in that “To care for another person, in the most significant sense, is to help him grow and actualize himself” (as cited in Noddings, 2013, p. 9). This involves being attentive to the needs of others, supporting those around us, and fulfilling our responsibilities both at home and in educational settings, all of which I argue are deliberate acts of care.

The etymological definition of intention is “done with intention, design, or purpose; intended” (etymonline, n.d.). For example, when I make art with my children, I aim to approach the time spent together with the intention of being engrossed or fully attentive. I have a genuine interest in our interactions and the experience of helping my children grow. This engrossment can be characterized as more of an emotional feeling or state, an extension of natural care.

However, as Noddings elaborated, “engrossment is not completely characterized as *emotional* feeling. There is a characteristic and appropriate mode of consciousness in caring” (1984, p. 33). This delineation is important because, according to Noddings, engrossment is essential in caring and is essential for effective learning and a deeper understanding in educational environments. She emphasizes that when children or learners are in environments where they feel genuinely cared for and safe, this creates the conditions for engrossment to occur. Noddings illuminates, “At bottom, all caring involves engrossment. The engrossment need not be intense nor need it be pervasive in the life of the one-caring, but it must have occurred” (Noddings, 2013, p. 17).

When students become engrossed in a subject or idea, for example, how artists in their community use recycled materials, they are more likely to be inspired, curious, and learn in profound ways. Goss (2018) posits that “Teachers should be encouraged to reflect on the role of

engrossment and care in their practice and given permission to become engrossed and care for their students” (p. 3). This aligns with Noddings’ call for a more holistic form of education focused on the emotional and moral well-being of students. Therefore, engrossment is a vital element for both effective learning environments and caring relationships. Engrossment and receptivity are connected in that engrossment is a precursor for receptivity.

According to Noddings, it is through receptive engagement with others that caring and moral development can occur, as well as deeper learning. Noddings (1984) asserted, “The receptive mode seems to be an essential component of intellectual work. We do not pass into it under stress, and this is further evidence that it is not a degradation of consciousness” (p. 34). I find the assertion on eliminating stress to be a critical point, highlighting the importance of cultivating caring and creative environments that foster receptivity and growth. Curating peaceful and joyful spaces allows individuals to more easily enter this receptive mode. When in such a state, we are more likely to experience deeper development, heightened consciousness, and perhaps even a state of joy. I have long believed that artmaking serves as a means of calming the nerves and additionally, that the space one is in also has an important role. Related, Reggio Emilia’s concept of “space as the third teacher” refers to the idea that the physical environment plays a crucial role in children's learning, development, and well-being alongside the two primary teachers: the educator and the peer group (Edwards et al., 2011). Therefore, one could argue that collaborative artmaking can be a vital physical, social, and emotional space for reducing stress, thereby increasing the potential for engrossment and receptivity. When parents are deeply engaged with their children and attuned to their needs and perspectives, a deeper emotional connection is established, which, in turn, enhances the likelihood of children being fully present and attentive to the needs of others. The same principle applies in educational

settings. When teachers genuinely care about their students' well-being and are receptive to their needs, students are more likely to be responsive to both the teaching and the needs of their peers.

Of course, it is impossible to remain perpetually in the receptive mode (Noddings, 1984). To ask this of anyone would be unreasonable. However, “attention—receptive attention—is an essential characteristic of the caring encounter” (Noddings, 1984, p. 17). If parents and educators want to guide our children and students in attending and caring for others, we must attend and care for them. It is challenging but essential in working toward the development of the caring attitude and caring ideal. Noddings (2002) explained, “Child rearing and education are central to care theory because caring-for precedes caring-about and because learning to be cared for precedes both” (p. 26). This is why it is essential to understand the roles engrossment and receptivity play in helping to guide and educate children in an imperfect world. It is not a prescriptive theory but opens itself to people's interactions, understandings, and experiences. The more practice one has in experiencing genuine listening and reception, the more these experiences add to memory and to developing a caring attitude; a reminder that ‘practice’ in artmaking and in care is needed. The caring attitude, which Noddings described as “that attitude which expresses our earliest memories of being cared for and our growing store of memories of both caring and being cared for” (p. 5), is universally accessible. However, according to Noddings, ethical judgments based on care cannot be universally applied. Instead of focusing on making judgments, the emphasis should be on how we engage with each other in a moral and caring way.

The Caring Ideal

Noddings (1984) reminds us why the caring ideal is critical in conversations about community relationships and educational settings pointing out that:

as we build an ethic on caring and as we examine education under its guidance, we shall see that the greatest obligation of educators, inside and outside formal schooling, is to nurture the ethical ideals of those with whom they come in contact. (p. 49)

Since this inquiry aligns with Dewey's (1938) ideas that there is always learning potential in every day, and that educational experiences occur everywhere, in homes, communities, schools, etc., an ethics of care is foundational for moral and ethical development in all these spaces. The caring ideal emphasizes genuine concern for the well-being of others, which is foundational for building strong, trusting relationships within homes, communities, and educational environments. When individuals feel cared for, they are more likely to engage meaningfully, collaborate, and support one another, leading to stronger communities.

According to Goss (2018), "Dewey supported educational experiences that were genuine and meaningful to children that were lived educational experiences in that moment but would also support and inform later experiences" (p. 33). Therefore, to work toward developing the caring ideal, the caring attitude would be present in these experiences to support and inform the formation of memories to inform later experiences. Noddings explains how the caring attitude of the one-caring affects the cared-for. For example, an attitude of warm acceptance from the one-caring allows the cared-for to "grow and glow under the perceived attitude of the one-caring" and alternatively with a negative caring attitude, "the evidence is clear that the rejection characteristic of non-caring has observable effects in the 'cared-for'" (Noddings, 1984, p. 67). Many people can recall specific experiences with different types of caring attitudes. For example, when my family moved to Georgia just as I was starting my junior year of high school, I remember my volleyball coach and P.E. teacher who made a significant impact. He went out of his way to ensure I felt welcomed on the new team, showing genuine care for each player's

emotional growth both on and off the court. His supportive attitude helped me adjust to the transition, allowing me to “grow and glow” despite the challenges of moving to a new town and school.

In my 10 years of parenting, I’ve learned how much my own caring attitude influences how my children respond to and receive my care. When I approach situations with patience and love, our experiences are generally much smoother compared to when I approach them with impatience and negativity. Although this might seem like a simple concept, it is crucial to remember how deeply a caring attitude affects learning experiences and the development of ethical ideals.

Noddings (2013) emphasizes, “The primary aim of all education must be nurturance of the ethical ideal” (p. 6). But what exactly is the ethical ideal? As Noddings describes it, the ethical ideal is a vision of our “best self” grounded in ethical decision-making and moral action that stems from genuine care for others (Noddings, 1984, p. 80). It represents an ideal world where communities and individuals prioritize nurturing caring relationships. Noddings (1984) argues the ethical ideal comes from two sentiments: “the natural sympathy human beings feel for each other and the longing to maintain, recapture, or enhance our most caring and tender moments” (p. 104). This is why the memories of caring and being cared for are essential to the building of the ethical ideal, as one refers to these memories of care as a guide for moral guidance and decision-making. With this in mind, I argue for the prioritization of nurturing caring relationships between families, communities, and schools so that memories of care can begin forming as early as possible. At the same time, Noddings takes into account that many people may not experience early memories of care, that everyone’s experiences are different, and that we will often fail as humans. Despite this, Noddings (1984) counsels:

Like Nietzsche's new philosopher, 'we are of yesterday and tomorrow.' From our yesterdays, we accept the earned constraints upon our ideal. Toward our tomorrows, we fashion what may be attained. The requirement of attainability is as important as that of constraint. Indeed, it is a forward-looking set of constraints. It is not necessary that I, a concrete moral agent, actually attain my ideal—surely, I shall fail repeatedly—but the ideal itself must be attainable in the actual world. (p. 109)

Therefore, Noddings' ethics of care is one of hope and not of abstraction. It is something one can obtain with actual people and actual relations. The caring ideal impacts how we think about human relationships, social ethics, and education and gives us a foundation for what to prioritize. In relationships, the caring ideal encourages the consideration of others' needs and feelings and acting and making decisions in favor of the well-being of others. In educational practice, the ethical ideal strives for the holistic development of students and the prioritization of caring relationships between teachers and students.

Concerns About Care

I acknowledge that care has been presented positively thus far throughout this inquiry; however, it is equally important to address concerns and critiques related to caring relationships and the theory of care. Examining these aspects helps provide a more balanced perspective on the complexities and challenges inherent in care theory. As previously touched on, caring is complicated and oftentimes burdensome. In fact, the etymological definition of care is to "be anxious or solicitous; grieve; feel concern or interest" (etymonline, n.d.). Similarly, when one looks up synonyms for "care," the results include responsibility, load, concern, fear, foreboding, and burden. Because caring for others is challenging, it leaves the one caring open to possible pain, disappointment, and failure. However, rather than thinking about care as a binary, positive

or negative, one can think about care along a continuum, allowing oneself to call on the ethical ideal and the potential of joy to sustain us in caring.

While Noddings' theory of care continues to receive significant support, critiques have been made over the years. In discussions of Noddings' theory of care, three general critiques are offered: (1) limited emphasis on justice as an aspect of morality, (2) encouragement or perpetuation of traditional gender roles for women, and (3) lack of clarity and universality. Hassan (2008) wrote an extensive critique that challenges "Noddings' ethic of care suggesting that it could be greatly enhanced by the addition of other virtues aside from care, such as justice or autonomous growth" (p. 161). Similarly, Held (2005), proposed a "meshing of care and justice" when approaching social injustices and social relations, arguing for a more nuanced understanding of justice that incorporates the principles of care (p. 128). Held explained that instead of viewing care and justice as separate or even conflicting concepts, they should be integrated to provide a more comprehensive framework for addressing social issues.

I agree with Held that integrating the principles of justice (such as equality and fairness) with the principles of care (such as empathy and responsiveness) is a rich and practical framework for addressing social relations. In response to these critiques, it's important to note that Noddings' ethics of care, introduced in 1984, emerged as a counterpoint to ethical philosophies that had predominantly focused on justice while neglecting the role of care. Although Noddings' theory emphasizes care over justice in moral decision-making, she also recognizes the importance of justice.

One concern raised in the critiques of the ethics of care theory is that it may reinforce traditional gender roles for women. This is an issue Noddings has frequently addressed. Critics such as Hassan (2008), Hoagland (1990), and Held (2005) have described Noddings' theory as

reflecting a feminine approach, which has sparked discussions about its implications for gender roles. Hassan (2008) criticizes Noddings' suggestion:

Her conclusion that ethical care is dependent on natural care is an interesting statement, because it is true that it is sometimes difficult to decipher whether the motivation behind certain actions is due to an innate compulsion to act or a sense of obligation to act. However, suggesting that care is innate is to imply that it is a woman's nature to be compassionate and caring all the time. The ethic of care ignores the other virtues of a woman and replaces them simply with the virtue of care. (p. 159)

Although I agree with Hassan that we must be cautious not to overlook other virtues, I disagree with the idea that Noddings implies women should always be caring and compassionate. On the contrary, Noddings emphasizes the importance of self-care and acknowledges that it is not feasible to be perpetually in a receptive and engrossed state. As Noddings (2002) clarifies, "a life of care is not necessarily a life of 'cares and burdens' but rather, one of joy and fulfillment. It may require occasional sacrifices (what ethic does not?), but it does not require self-abnegation" (p. 46). Her theory of care is not about self-righteousness. It acknowledges the full range of human experience, including both positive and negative aspects.

However, it is important to recognize that women have historically been expected to fulfill the role of the "one-caring." While there are valid concerns about oversimplification and the assumption that women are naturally more inclined to nurturing roles, Noddings has clarified that her theory is about human relations and is not intended to favor one gender over another. She has argued that traditional gender roles, particularly those that define women as natural caregivers, have historically been a source of oppression. She has also asserted that the qualities associated with care, such as empathy, relational understanding, and attunement, are crucial

moral values that are important for everyone, regardless of gender. It may be time to reconsider these arguments about socializations, norms, etc. Ultimately, we should all be concerned with improving how we care for one another and how we avoid causing harm to ourselves and others (Noddings, 2002).

Various other scholars, such as Tronto (1994) and Nussbaum (2000), have critiqued the ethics of care for its cultural specificity and lack of universality. Tronto (1993) argued that care ethics can be too closely tied to the particular experiences of middle-class Western women and may not be universally applicable across different social and cultural context, as “the activity of caring is largely defined culturally, and will vary among cultures” (p. 103). Nussbaum (2000) also critiqued care ethics for its lack of universality and global application and advocated for a more universalist approach that addresses the needs of individuals in an equitable manner.

I agree with the critiques that an ethics of care can lack universality and clarity, and for the need to continue to refine and expand the theory, so that one can understand better how care ethics can be applied in a more inclusive manner. This critique is understandable given that our experiences as humans are subjective, and this subjectivity can make it challenging to establish a universal moral framework or ethical system. There cannot be a concrete framework for how to care for others or make moral decisions, as it is always contextual, complicated, and conditional. However, in reference to Noddings original text, Tredinnick-Kirby (2022) referencing Eken (2017) explains:

Noddings offered the world a care-based perspective of moral philosophy... a detailed account of the definition, the scope, and the characteristic of her perspective, a way of living ethically using the moral value of care as the basis. (p. 32)

Even though there are no concrete rules, an ethics of care provides characteristics and a framework for how to care for ourselves and others and approach moral decision-making.

Noddings (1999) describes her thinking in terms of the universal:

I started out thinking of care as a primary, even as a universal, human attribute. After a discussion with Jim Gibbs, a Stanford anthropologist, I was convinced that caring may not be universal. What is universal, Gibbs said, is the desire to be cared for, the desire for caring relations. There is nothing moral about that desire in itself. But its universality makes it reasonable to posit the caring relation as a primitive good. Manifestations of the desire to be cared for range from the absolute need of infancy to the aloof desire to be treated with respect that is so characteristic of mature persons in individualistic cultures. The manifestations differ over cultures, times, and individuals. But the relation is everywhere taken as basically good. (p. 38)

I love this how Noddings flips the idea of universality in this quote to focus on the desire for caring relations. Despite the concerns and critiques of care theory, the understanding of the universality of the need and desire for caring relations in all areas of life confirms the need and application of Noddings' ethics of care theory.

Now that I have theorized care according to Noddings, it is essential to expand this understanding by examining other educational theories in relation to artmaking care, for example, how Dewey's (1934/1984/2002) emphasis on experience plays a crucial role in understanding how experiential learning and care are intertwined. The next section of this chapter explores how Dewey's theory of experience and other pedagogical frameworks such as Montessori, Reggio Emilia, and place-based philosophies informed and underpinned the

pedagogical framework and guiding principles of the FAC. These frameworks above are all fundamental to early childhood spaces.

Guiding Principles and Pedagogical Frameworks in Relation to Care

Throughout my years as an educator and a Master/Ph.D. student, I have been intrigued by pedagogical frameworks such as place-based and experiential arts education. This interest has grown deeper throughout my journey of parenting and caring for my children, who attended a Montessori school for many years, and, most recently, in my role as a director of a play-based school (with underpinnings in Reggio-Emilia) with an enrollment of almost 100 children. I am a firm believer that children learn best when they are safe, secure, and cared for, and that their learning is most effective when it is hands-on and relevant to their lives. Therefore, this inquiry and the guiding principles of the FAC are infused and informed by all of these philosophies, with a particular emphasis on the importance of hands-on experiences, all of which align with different aspects of Noddings' ethics of care.

Dewey and Experience

Dewey, a moral, educational theorist and one of Noddings' inspirations, contended that knowledge was achieved and synthesized through experiences. Although Dewey and Noddings are both moral and educational theorists, according to Tredinnick-Kirby (2022), their approaches complement each other. However, they also

examine, describe, and approach morality differently. Dewey contends that morality is an ethic directed toward goodness through consciousness. In contrast, Noddings believes that caring is the foundation for morality. Dewey focuses on real-life experience, and Noddings focuses on empathy and kindness, which is care. (p. 22)

However, Tredinnick-Kirby explains how both theories were relevant to her artist residency with her children, centered around empathy, kindness (care), and hands-on art experiences. Although Dewey and Noddings applied morality differently, Noddings aligns with Dewey in that education should be centered and rooted in human experience. Moreover, according to Tanner (2007), "Dewey believed that a school, as an intermediate institution between the home and society, should give the child an opportunity to be a participating and contributing member of a community" (p. 43). As a researcher and a school director, I wanted to provide a space for parents and children to get to know local artists in their community and make art together centered around the artists' teaching and mediums. This was provided regarding the experience within the school space but after school hours.

Learning from doing, participating with others, and communicating throughout the experience were vital to Dewey's educational goals. These were also key goals of this inquiry: for the school to be an intermediary between home life and the local community to bring families and young learners together. The school, in this context, played a crucial role as a community intermediary, facilitating interactions and experiences that fostered care and understanding. It was a way for families to get to know one another better, to get to know artists in their community better, and for parents and children to make art together. In this way, the school acted as an intermediary between home and society.

Tanner (2007) goes on to share how "Dewey argued that children are inherently active, with strong impulses to investigate, to share with others what they have found out, to construct practical things, and to create" (p. 44). It is incredible to see children's excitement when making and creating things and their eagerness to share this with others. When parents and children can make art together, it can become a sight where this investigation and making occurs together; the

excitement is shared. These experiences can provide opportunities for rich engrossment and receptivity, which is care. Pachucki (2016) points out that

Dewey argues that the significance of the experience is judged by the relationship between an individual and the environment—the social embedding of this experience or knowledge. In his influential treatise *Art as Experience* (1934), Dewey explains that artistic expression—one mode of creative action—attempts to recapture the complexity of lived experience. (p. 124)

Although Dewey references the relationship between an individual and the environment, it differs from the relationships Noddings speaks to. Relationships with one another complement one another. Strengthening relationships with one's environment or community, primarily through artmaking experiences where new people, concepts, and vocabulary are introduced, helps children develop confidence and self-expression. This artistic expression, capturing (or recapturing) lived experiences, can profoundly impact and create lasting memories.

Care and Artmaking in Early Childhood

It is essential to reflect upon Noddings' teaching that if we want to educate children in care, they must have experience with caring and being cared for. This inquiry centered on artmaking experiences with four—and five-year-olds, their parents, and artists within their community. Artmaking, in this context, is not just about creating visual or tactile objects, but about the process of creation itself.

Carol Garboden Murray (2021), in her book *Illuminating Care: The Pedagogy and Practice of Care in Early Childhood Communities*, teaches how care is an attitude, an action, and an ethic, which aligns with the work of Noddings. Her work focuses on the application and essentialness of care in early childhood settings. Murray advises how the action of care is when

we physically respond to a child's needs, such as feeding, holding, or comforting a child. It responds to needs and provides what is needed for the growth and protection of those in our care. Care as an attitude is our engrossment, attention, tone, and presence towards the cared-for as the ones caring. Finally, care as an ethic in early childhood communities is as follows:

A moral code by which we encounter one another with the view that care is the seed of our strength and survival. The field of care ethics centers relationship and interdependence as the universal human condition and values the virtues of caring such as empathy, compassion, love, and trust. (p. 7)

I agree with Murray that care is the foundation for building a strong society and that "even the most basic rituals of caring between adult and child require dignity, respect, presence, dialogue, and intelligence" (p. 8).

In my two years as school director, I worked with one of the most exceptional teachers I have ever known, Ms. Rowley. She approached her work with four- and five-year-olds with dignity, respect, and intelligence, placing great value on discovery, art experiences, and meaningful dialogue. Upon entering her classroom, the warmth, love, and care were palpable, and it was clear that the students, in turn, felt confident to inquire, explore, and engage with their environment. Noddings (1984) reiterates how "the child genuinely cared for is free to respond as himself, to create, to follow his interests without unnecessary fear and anxiety" (p. 72). While this teacher was not specifically an arts educator, she fostered dialogue and creative expression and provided experiences for her students to learn through art making. Students in her classroom were supported and cared for, and this was evident in their confidence and ability to express themselves. Hay and Howell (2021) explain how, as arts practitioners

Our responsibility is to be a part of the children's learning experience, motivating them through meaningful dialogue. Suppose we do not provide this interaction with art. In that case, it becomes limited to only sensory experiences . . . as practitioners, we need to be able to see the difference between early obtained, superficial outcomes and deep level learning. (p. 8)

This is a call for meaningful experiences in learning through art. Just as Ms. Rowley encouraged and supported her students in the classroom, this inquiry aimed to extend these meaningful experiences for children and their parents. Artmaking is not limited to the formal classroom and should be encouraged in other areas of children's lives. As Eisner (1998) posits, "Early art exposure is critical and, if unnurtured, it may be difficult to recover" (p. 42). It may be challenging to recover, but we (as the one-caring) would miss out on rich opportunities to cultivate curiosity and foster positive, caring relationships with the children in our care.

In conclusion, care and artmaking in early childhood are essential to the holistic growth of young learners and the building of caring relationships between adults and children. Noddings argued that a theory of care should be at the core of all educational practices. To care for others and to be cared for is a foundation of human experience, as we are all connected. Care ethics should be integral in how we approach and treat others, as well as art education. Making art together can be uniquely situated to allow for caring relationships to flourish, as it creates rich opportunities to be engrossed and receptive to those around us during the process. This potential of artmaking to foster positive relationships should give us hope for the future. Moving forward to the next chapter, I will discuss the methodology of this inquiry.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to contribute to a deeper understanding of how artmaking in an after-school FAC nurtured caring relationships and supported the well-being of young learners and families, both among themselves and within their communities. By gaining this insight, educators, caregivers, and community organizers can better appreciate the value of collaborative artmaking between adults and children and how such practices might influence approaches to integrating care and intentional artmaking into educational programs, classrooms, and daily life. Additionally, by employing video methods in this inquiry, I aimed to offer valuable insights for future art education researchers interested in using similar techniques.

This study specifically addressed the research question: How are caring relationships nurtured among young learners and families through artmaking with local artists in an afterschool art club? In this chapter, I outline the rationale for choosing a qualitative approach and explain how video ethnography methods align with the goals of this inquiry. A detailed description of the FAC follows, including an overview of the participants, the setting, and the activities that took place during each session. The chapter concludes with a description of the methods used for data collection, such as field notes and video-cued interviews.

Qualitative Inquiry

At its core, this inquiry is qualitative, as artmaking and relationships are both highly qualitative in that they are complex, organic, and often messy, requiring an interpretive and reflexive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Care is a subtle and multifaceted element of human

relationships, often emerging in unidentified or easily understood ways. In this regard, qualitative research provides a powerful lens for exploring and interpreting complex human experiences, enabling researchers to bring these hidden or nuanced aspects of life—such as care—into focus. As Denzin and Lincoln (2011) described:

Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them. (p. 3)

This interpretive and naturalistic approach aligns closely with the goals of this study, as it sought to uncover the subtle dynamics of caring relationships in an after-school FAC. By observing and engaging with participants and using tools like video ethnography, I aimed to capture the nuances of care, connection, and interaction that might often remain hidden. Furthermore, Denzin and Lincoln's (2011) description of qualitative research highlights its potential to influence practices and contribute to the field of art education. This potential is particularly significant in art education, where many learning processes, such as creativity and emotional expression, are often subtle and complex to measure. Qualitative research offers ways to capture these situated experiences and share them in visible and shareable ways through interviews, visual documentation, and observations. Their definition supports visual methods in this inquiry, as visual and video techniques allow for exploring artmaking as it naturally occurs. Since this study explored artmaking and caring relationships, video was essential for capturing

the subtle, nuanced interactions that unfolded throughout the inquiry over time, as well as helping to bring the world into focus through representations such as video recordings, photographs, and deeper reflections that arose from revisiting these experiences.

Qualitative inquiry also aligns with Nodding's ethics of care which emphasizes the interconnectedness of human relationships (1984). Butler-Kisber (2018) conceptualizes qualitative inquiry as a holistic process, not simply a method or technique, but a way of being within the research. It "embraces an ethical and relational stance throughout the research process... the inquiry is considered the method, not separate from it" (Butler-Kisber, 2018, p. 11). As the researcher and acting director of the Day School, where this inquiry took place, I could not separate myself from the experiences or relationships within the inquiry; I was naturally positioned as a participant observer that is, "both a participant and an observer, fully immersed in the setting to experience reality as the research participants do" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 155). I was deeply involved in the FAC as its designer, participating alongside the children, parents, and artists; as researcher, observing and studying participants interactions; and as the school director, responsible for the well-being of the students and families who attended the school. My dual role allowed me to observe and experience firsthand how artmaking fostered caring relationships and supported the well-being of participants. This dual role is critical to thorough reflexive research.

Braun and Clarke (2022) further explain that "reflexive research treats knowledge as situated, and as inevitably and inescapably shaped by the processes and practices of knowledge production, including the practices of the researcher" (p. 12). This challenges the notion of an objective, detached researcher, instead positioning the researcher as an active participant whose cultural, social, and intellectual background shapes the research process. Therefore, reflexivity,

which requires critical self-awareness and the examination of one's own assumptions and biases, was especially crucial in this study which focused on relational dimensions. The interactions between myself as the researcher and the participants were central to the knowledge produced.

As evidenced in the descriptions of the FAC sessions below, video methods were a critical way to capture the many situated and dynamic aspects of the participant's experiences. These data collection methods fall under video ethnography, a specialized visual ethnography that focuses on using video as the primary tool to capture and analyze human experiences (MacDougall, 1998; Pink, 2007; Tobin, 2000). While visual ethnography may include various forms of media such as photographs, drawings, or maps, video ethnography is unique in its ability to record real-time interactions, gestures, and expressions, offering a richer understanding of human interaction (Pink, 2007). In this research, video methods were chosen because of their ability to capture the participants' interactions, expressions, gestures, and actions in the most authentic way possible - elements that are critical for understanding social dynamics and experiences in settings like artmaking, where care, play, and creativity are central.

While no representation can fully encapsulate another's experience, video uniquely captures the relational self—an essential aspect of this inquiry. As Denzin (2010) points out, "the world can never be captured directly; we only study representations of it. We study the way people represent their experiences to themselves and to others" (p. 10). Video allowed me to document these representations in a way that transcends what can be expressed through photographs or words alone. Through video, I recorded the visual and auditory aspects of the artmaking process, capturing the creation of artworks and the flow of interactions, behaviors, and events over time. This approach allowed me to revisit these interactions repeatedly, a crucial process for a deeper understanding of FAC's relationships and social dynamics.

Before further discussing the data collection methods, it is important to share details about the research site, participants, and the activities that took place during the FAC. This will provide the reader with a clearer understanding of what occurred during FAC by providing a rich description of activities and participant experiences.

Research Site and Rationale

This inquiry took place at a play-based early childhood day school (Figure 3) in a university town in the Southeastern U.S., where I served as acting director, a role I began in August 2021.

Figure 3

The Day School Building



The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic significantly influenced this research. Initially, I planned to conduct the inquiry in various artists' studios around town, pairing children and families with local artists to create art together and involving the community and artists more extensively. However, the pandemic significantly limited the scope of community engagement. In my new role as director, I also recognized a pressing need within the school community. The

school had been closed for 17 months due to the pandemic, leaving families feeling disconnected. This prolonged closure highlighted a clear need and desire for spaces that fostered opportunities for reconnection. Therefore, I adjusted the setting to the Day School while retaining the core focus of my inquiry: fostering connections between families, children, and artists through collaborative artmaking.

The Day School, an extension of an Episcopal Church, has served the local community since 1982, offering a half-day, play-based preschool program for children ages 20 months to 4 years, operating from 9:00 am to 12:30 pm. At the time of this inquiry, the school included three classes of two-year-olds, three classes of three-year-olds, and one class of four-year-olds. Grounded in a play-based philosophy, the school emphasized hands-on, exploratory play to nurture curiosity, creativity, and problem-solving (Ferreira, 2021; Gray, 2013). Teachers acted as facilitators, allowing children to direct their learning and engage in collaborative play that builds communication and social-emotional skills (Brown, 2010; Gray, 2013; Wood & Attfield, 2013). The school's philosophy aligned with the goals of the FAC, making it a natural extension where artmaking was approached as a form of exploratory, collaborative engagement and play. Through this approach, both the school and the FAC emphasized holistic development—nurturing not only cognitive and academic growth but also emotional well-being and social connections.

I selected the Day School as the research site because it provided access to young learners and families with whom I had already established connections in my role as director. Though the Day School is affiliated with the Episcopal Church, religious participation is not required for enrollment, and the families represent a diverse range of backgrounds, faiths, and

beliefs. While I was a member of the church, I did not previously know most of the families, though I had casual acquaintances with some of the local artists involved in the project.

The FAC took place after school hours from approximately 12:45 to 2:15 pm in various areas of the school, including the four-year-olds' classroom, an outdoor space, and the large common room. A detailed description of the design and implementation of the FAC is discussed later in this chapter.

I obtained IRB approval before proceeding with my research inquiry. The IRB process required me to thoroughly outline all the procedures and methods I planned to use. As required by the IRB, I secured external site authorization to conduct research at the Day School (see Appendix E for a copy of the External Site Authorization). Additionally, since I was working with minors, a vulnerable population, it was crucial to adhere to all IRB standards to ensure informed consent and maintain participant confidentiality (see Appendix F for a copy of the IRB approval).

Participants

The participants in this inquiry included nine children and nine parents from the Day School. The selection criteria were as follows:

All child participants were enrolled in the Day School's four-year-old class, and all family participants were family members of these children.

As the school's director, researcher, and facilitator of the FAC, I invited each child and their family from the "Fours" class to participate. This was the oldest class in the Day School, with children aged four or five years old. I chose the "Fours" class for several reasons: first, with only one class of four-year-olds, I could invite all the families without needing to exclude anyone. Second, children of this age are developmentally capable of participating in sustained art

activities, reflecting on their experiences, and staying after school since they no longer require midday naps.

The class had 14 students, and I invited all families to participate in the FAC via email and a consent letter explaining the purpose of the research, schedule, and structure (see Appendix A for the participant recruitment and consent letter). I also explained how all FAC sessions would be recorded on video. Of the 14 families, nine chose to participate. I also clarified that other family members, such as siblings or grandparents, were welcome to join. Each family was given two copies of the consent letter; those who agreed to participate were asked to return the signed copy of the consent form, which also indicated their preferred dates, to me by Friday, February 11, 2022.

Once I knew the number of participants, I divided the FAC into two smaller groups to limit the number of people in each session, allowing for better observation and video recording while also accounting for the ongoing uncertainty of COVID-19, as the school's mask mandate was lifted midway through the FAC sessions. Each group met for four sessions, which lasted approximately 1.5 hours from 12:45 pm to 2:15 pm.

- **Group A:** Three children and three parents, meeting on February 24, 2022, March 4, 2022, March 18, 2022, and March 25, 2022.
- **Group B:** Six children and six family members, meeting on April 1, 2022, April 22, 2022, April 29, 2022, and May 6, 2022.

Privilege must be considered in the context of this research. The families who participated were afforded a certain level of privilege, as they could send their children to a half-day school and attend an art club in the middle of the day. This flexibility reflects socioeconomic and situational advantages unavailable to all families, as many parents cannot adjust work

schedules or other responsibilities to participate in midday activities. Recognizing this disparity is critical to understanding the accessibility limitations of this particular art club model. While effective in fostering relationships and community through artmaking, the model inherently excludes families with less flexible schedules. By addressing these privilege issues, I recognize the need to explore more inclusive, adaptable models of community-based art education that consider and accommodate diverse family structures and socioeconomic backgrounds.

The Four Families

Although I do talk about all participants, among the nine participating families, I chose to focus the bulk of my analysis on the following four families due to their high level of participation and commitment to a follow-up, video-cued interview:

- Sally and her daughter, Etta
- Kayley and her son, Chris
- Carmen and her daughter, Ingrid
- Emily and her daughter, Chandra

All participant names, including children, parents, and artists, are pseudonyms.

The Artists

The artists involved in the FAC were active working artists in the community with either a passion for working with children and/or significant community involvement. Originally, the artists were considered participants in this inquiry. However, it quickly became clear that, while the artists remained integral to the pedagogy of the FAC, they were not the primary focus of the inquiry. It remains important to introduce them and explain how their role in the FAC was central to nurturing connections through art, as they brought a wealth of expertise, creativity, and a deep connection to the community that enriched the experience for both children and families.

To identify these artists who would be invited to lead the FAC sessions, I began by compiling a list of local artists I was familiar with or had previously met who might be interested in being involved. I then consulted with several art teachers and professors in the community, who provided feedback and suggested additional artists. Once the list was refined, I focused on identifying artists with experience working with children and that had a strong presence in the community. The artists were carefully selected based on their enthusiasm for working with children and families, their expertise in the field, and their community involvement, rather than being chosen at random. To ensure a diverse range of learning experiences, I also aimed to include artists skilled in different mediums.

I contacted each artist via email, inviting them to participate and including a consent letter (see Appendix B for the Artist Recruitment and Consent Letter). The artists were compensated \$100.00 per session, as I strongly believed in paying them for their time. I secured a \$1,000 graduate research grant from a university program to cover these payments and the cost of art materials. Ultimately, the three artists who agreed to participate were:

- Ben (painting)
- Marley (ceramics)
- Lukas (sculpture)

Ben and Lukas were casual acquaintances of mine, while Marley was someone I had not yet met. However, in terms of alignment with my intentional pedagogy, I knew that Ben was actively involved in community outreach and working with children. Lukas was a retired and beloved elementary art teacher, and Marley was a former Montessori educator. Ben and Lukas each led one session for Groups A and B, while Marley led two sessions for each group. It was my belief that through guiding the artmaking process, the artists would serve as facilitators of

care, modeling creative expression and empathetic interactions, while also demonstrating the relevance of art in everyday life. Their presence introduced families to different artistic practices, allowing children and parents to explore new forms of creativity together through the skills and perspectives of artists in their community, thus nurturing a sense of shared discovery and mutual growth. Additionally, by bridging the gap between professional artists and community members, the artists played a key role in nurturing a sense of belonging and cultural continuity within the community by sharing their work with others. Lawton et al. (2019) explain that one of the primary goals of community-based approaches to art education “is learning and making meaningful connections with others through art” (p. 38). Through these artistic engagements, Ben, Marley, and Lukas helped foster meaningful, place-based learning that engaged the participants with authentic learning experiences. These experiences infused connections not only between individual family members but also between families and the broader cultural context of the community, reinforcing the idea that art can serve as a powerful vehicle for care and human connection.

Preparation for FAC

As the descriptions of the FAC sessions will show below, the guiding principles of the FAC were informed by the ethics of care theory and further shaped by principles derived from Montessori, Reggio Emilia, place-based, and play-based pedagogical frameworks. Together, these frameworks guided the overall approach. After Ben, Marley, and Lukas confirmed their participation, it was crucial to integrate their expertise and perspectives into planning the sessions while also aligning with the guiding principles. In the weeks leading up to the FAC, the artists and I maintained regular communication to coordinate the planning of their sessions and confirm their attendance. This planning process was collaborative, as I shared the overarching

vision for the FAC while encouraging the artists to contribute their expertise. This development included designing art activities that highlighted each artists talents and interests while also nurturing collaborative relationships, selecting materials that inspired playful engagement, and encouraged exploration and collaboration.

Gruenwald (2003) explains:

The point of becoming more conscious of places in education is to extend our notions of pedagogy and accountability outward toward places. Thus extended, pedagogy becomes more relevant to the lived experience of students and teachers, and accountability is reconceptualized so that places matter to educators, students, and citizens in tangible ways. (p.620)

In alignment with this perspective, I aimed to collaborate with the artists in planning activities that specifically connected the learning experiences in the FAC to the lived experiences of both the artists and participants, fostering deeper connections to the local physical and creative landscape. Examples of how the artists and I developed the activities with a place-based approach include how Ben, a painter, designed a painting activity centered around acrylic painting on canvas. While participants had the freedom to choose their designs, Ben offered the option of tape-resist painting, a method he used in creating a local collaborative mural. Sharing this technique allowed participants to directly connect their art club learning to Ben's work and the mural visible in their community.

Marley planned to share examples of her collaborative work with another well-known local artist, as well as share clay that she collected from nearby creeks with the participants. By explaining how she collected this clay and used it in her work, she emphasized the origins and connections within our area. Lukas added depth to his assemblage sculpture lesson by bringing

pieces such as old piano pieces and scraps from a local woodworker and spoon maker. He shared stories about gathering these materials and how the woodworker repurposed the scraps. Each artist made a concerted effort to tie their activities to their personal style of making and the broader local community, enriching the participants' understanding and sense of place.

The general structure of the FAC sessions involved the artist introducing themselves and their work during the first few minutes of the session, followed by an explanation of the project and related instructions. The remainder of the time was dedicated to artmaking and play, with the artists observing and guiding as needed, aligning with the program's emphasis on creativity, exploration, and collaboration. While I also provided support as needed, the artists were the primary teachers and guides during their respective sessions.

Data Collection Methods

The rich interactions and the sense of community nurtured in each session highlight the importance of capturing participant engagement and interaction depth. To accurately document the nuances of these interactions—such as collaborative exchanges, emotional responses, and non-verbal cues—I employed multiple data collection methods, as recommended by Bloomberg and Volpe (2016), who emphasizes that "the use of multiple methods and triangulation is critical in attempting to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study" (p. 172). Video ethnography methods discussed in this chapter were employed as the primary method and a valuable resource to capture the participants' experiences. I chose video because it could capture participants' interactions, expressions, gestures, and activities most authentically (MacDougall, 1998; Pink, 2007; Tobin, 2000).

All sessions were recorded using 2-3 iPads positioned around the space, with additional documentation captured through video and photos on my iPhone. The use of iPads and iPhones,

versatile tools that could be adapted to the natural school environment, enabled me to collect visual and auditory data, capturing multifaceted dimensions of participants' experiences. The iPads were consistently stationed on tripods or strategically placed to capture vast areas of activity, positioned at a low height to be accessible to the children.

Revisiting the recordings multiple times was not just a task, but an immersive process that was essential to accurately interpret and understand what occurred and what was nurtured throughout the inquiry. By reviewing the experiences through video, I could immerse myself deeply in the data and become familiar with it, returning to it repeatedly. Additionally, video was crucial for conducting video-cued interviews, which served as another primary data source for this study.

The COVID-19 pandemic did impact my research methodologies, specifically in terms of my data collection methods. Reduced access to participants outside of school settings limited opportunities for conducting in-person interviews and observations in the broader community (such as visiting the artists' studios). These constraints are one of the main reasons I conducted the video-cued interviews almost two years after the FAC sessions. These constraints also reduced the scope of community engagement and required me to rethink how to capture the relational dynamics of artmaking. However, I am grateful that I could rely heavily on video ethnography methods to adapt to these challenges. Video footage was a crucial tool that allowed me to document and preserve the integrity of this inquiry and enrich my understanding of the relationships and connections nurtured through artmaking in this more contained setting.

FAC Sessions

In designing the FAC, I intentionally sought to set in motion an atmosphere of freedom, connection, and ease- qualities that I have come to deeply value through my experiences in

diverse classrooms and educational settings. I wanted children to feel free to move around the space and to explore and interact without restriction; I also wanted parents and families to feel equally comfortable engaging in conversation, lending a hand, and simply being present together. These aspects- freedom to move, talk, help, and listen- are things I have learned not to take for granted. In environments where children are discouraged from speaking or where the space feels rigid or unwelcoming, the discomfort is almost tangible. I intended to create a space that offered freedom and choice, where participants felt empowered to express themselves, connect with one another, and fully inhabit the artmaking experience. The FAC became a space for creativity, meaningful interactions, and community-building by fostering an environment that emphasized these qualities.

In this section, I provide a detailed account of each FAC session. At the beginning of each section, I include a brief overview video which aimed to share the overall environment and provide a visualization of the atmosphere for the reader of the sessions. FAC for Group A took place over four Fridays, from February 25, 2022, to March 25, 2022, while Group B's sessions were held on four Fridays between April 1, 2022, to May 6, 2022.

Additionally, I incorporated video clips that capture moments of interaction, sharing, and caregiving, emphasizing how the sessions fostered opportunities for dialogue, engagement, and engrossment beyond the artmaking process. By including these videos, I aimed to illustrate the relationships and dynamics between participants, showing that each session involved not only creative expression but also the building of a caring community.

Session One, February 25, 2022: Here We Go!

Figure 4

Session One Overview Video



The first FAC session was led by Ben, a painter, muralist, and community activist. The participants included Ellis, and his dad, Ed. As both the facilitator and researcher of this inquiry, I was eager to have Ben on board for several reasons. First, Ben is a talented Black artist whose work is widely visible in our community, with many of his pieces featured in public spaces. He has also led a mural arts program for teens and is deeply involved in social justice organizations and initiatives. I was excited for the children and families to learn about his work and discover where they could view his art, which includes several murals and numerous portraits in and around town. Since Ben primarily works as a painter, the artmaking activity he designed was focused on acrylic on canvas painting.

This first session took place in the familiar and comfortable environment of the 4's classroom, a space thoughtfully designed with the needs of young learners in mind. The low tables and child-sized chairs conveyed a sense of belonging and ease, in line with Montessori and

Reggio Emilia principles, which emphasize creating spaces that nurture independence and comfort for children. With only two participants—Ellis, a 5-year-old, and Ed, Ellis’s dad—we gathered around a single table, promoting a space for genuine engagement and dialogue, which Noddings’ (1984) stresses is significant in caring relationships.

Ben had set up easels and brushes, carefully preparing the materials to invite creativity and exploration. In keeping with the Reggio Emilia approach of considering the child’s perspective, he kept his introduction brief and engaging, introducing himself and sharing insights about his community projects while being mindful of Ellis’s age and attention span. Ben knew that, with only two participants, there would be ample time during the artmaking process to build rapport and engage in meaningful dialogue.

The atmosphere was calm and inviting, with the small group gathered together in a way that encouraged open communication and collaboration. As Ben introduced various painting styles and ideas for content, he passed out canvases, offering Ellis and Ed the choice to either follow a suggested style or create freely. Both gravitated towards the tape resist method, the same method Ben had used on a community mural project (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Ben Stands in Front of His Mural in the Local Community



Note. Photograph sourced from *The Red and Black* (2016); photo by Shubham Kadam.

This technique involves laying tape across a canvas to create a pattern. Once the tape is secured, the canvas is ready to be painted; one can paint different colors inside each “window” or section. Once the painting is finished and dry, the tape is slowly pulled off to reveal the tape-resist design. This activity is perfect for young artists and those who may not feel confident with painting. The creative freedom also aligns with Montessori teaching in how the participants were encouraged to experiment and make choices about how they use the materials. Tape-resist painting allowed for freedom in design, color choice, and technique, fostering independence and decision-making. It also became a collaborative effort, where Ed and Ellis discussed patterns, helped each other with tape placement, and experimented with colors together. This collaborative effort demonstrated the potential for caring, reciprocal relationships nurtured in this setting.

This interaction is one example of the core of the FAC’s purpose—artmaking as a vehicle for not only creative expression but also caregiving, collaboration, and building supportive relationships. As the session progressed, the room remained calm and quiet, with Ellis and Ed

both fully absorbed in the creative process. Halfway through the session, Ed set the tone further by playing soft jazz music, enhancing the reflective and peaceful atmosphere. The music led into a conversation where I learned that Ed was a musician, discussing the importance of music and expression. The remaining time unfolded as semi-structured studio time, with Ben offering guidance as needed, allowing Ed and Ellis the freedom to explore and engage deeply in the artmaking process. I, as a participant observer, was also able to sit and create with Ed, Ellis, and Ben, painting and talking together, the jazz music leading into a conversation where I learned that Ed was a musician, discussing the importance of music and expression. This time was rich with opportunities for interaction, dialogue, and shared discovery (Figures 6 and 7).

Figure 6

Ed and Ellis With Their Paintings



Figure 7

Ben and Ellis



Session Two, March 4, 2022: Pinch Pots and Play Time

Figure 8

Session Two Overview Video



The second FAC session was led by Marley, a ceramic artist and former Montessori teacher, whose background perfectly aligned with the FAC’s philosophy of creating a child-centered, flexible learning environment. This session, held once again in the 4’s classroom, had a notably higher energy level compared to the first session, largely due to the increased number of participants: Ellis and his dad Ed, Will and his mom Abby, and Hannah and her mom Jessie. The use of two tables allowed the group to spread out, but the proximity of the tables ensured that all participants could still engage and communicate freely, fostering a lively, collaborative atmosphere.

Marley began by introducing herself and sharing several of her ceramic pieces, including vases and ornaments, some of which were created in collaboration with a well-known community artist, Donovan (pseudonym). Marley’s dual expertise as a Montessori teacher and ceramic artist enriched the session in multiple ways. Her Montessori background, which

emphasizes a prepared yet adaptable environment, allowed her to guide the group without imposing rigid structure, encouraging exploration, independence, and self-motivation. Her artistic expertise provided participants with the opportunity to learn and experiment with a new medium (clay) under her skilled guidance.

In line with Montessori principles, the session was prepared to be both structured and flexible. After briefly introducing her work, Marley presented the materials and techniques for creating pinch pots, which would then be turned into rattles by attaching two pinch pots together, as well as carving into the clay (Figure 9).

Figure 9

Marley Demonstrates How to Carve Into the Clay



As the session unfolded, Marley moved around the room, offering individualized guidance based on the participants' questions and ideas. This responsive, non-directive teaching style mirrors the ethics of care and Montessori foundations, where the teacher supports the needs and interests of each participant, nurturing trust and collaboration.

Throughout the session, rich interactions emerged. Ellis and Ed worked closely together on their pinch pots, exchanging ideas and learning from one another's experimentation (Figure 11). At one point, Jessie demonstrated a new technique, and Hannah eagerly imitated her mother's movements, sparking a moment of shared discovery. Across the table, Will and his mom, Abby, worked more quietly, yet their collaboration was equally meaningful, as they were engrossed together in the artmaking process.

Figure 10

Ellis and Ed Work on Pinch Pots



The physical, hands-on nature of experimentation with clay was a great way for participants to engage in collaboration and shared learning (Figure 11).

Figure 11

Jessie and Hannah Engaging in Creating Their Pinch Pots



Towards the end of the session, Jessie gently encouraged Hannah to help with the clean-up, reinforcing the value of community responsibility. Such interactions go beyond the act of artmaking to reinforce the importance of caring for one another and the space. By gently guiding her daughter to participate in the communal responsibility of cleaning up, Jessie modeled care for the group, teaching Hannah that she is part of a larger community.

Session Three, March 18, 2022: Clay and Connection

Figure 12

Session Three Overview Video



The third FAC session, once again led by Marley, took place in the familiar 4's classroom, continuing the sense of consistency that fostered deeper rapport between the participants and artist. This continuity not only reinforced the relationships formed in previous sessions but also allowed for further development of the ceramic skills introduced earlier. The group for this session included Ellis and Ed, Will and Abby, and Hannah and Jessie.

The session focused on designing and cutting clay ornaments from slabs of clay, followed by learning the glazing process. Marley began by demonstrating how to cut slabs out of clay and smooth the edges of the clay, but she carefully avoided prescribing a final product. Instead, she encouraged participants to explore the material freely before committing to their designs in keeping with the Reggio Emilia and play-based philosophies, which emphasize the creative process over a final outcome. This approach encouraged creativity and autonomy, encouraging participants to experiment and express themselves without fear of judgment.

As the session unfolded, the room buzzed with excitement. The young learners and their family members eagerly shaped their slab ornaments, sharing their ideas and creative discoveries with one another (Figure 13).

Figure 13

Collaborating to Make Slab Ornaments



For example, Marley’s non-directive teaching style cultivated an atmosphere of mutual respect and openness, the joy and enthusiasm on their faces were clear as they worked together to glaze their pieces, embracing both the learning process and the sense of community it fostered.

Session Four, March 25, 2022: That’s the Treasure

Figure 14

Session Four Overview Video



The fourth and final FAC session for Group A was led by Lukas, a retired elementary school art teacher renowned for his warm and jovial nature and his expertise in collage and sculptures using recycled and found objects. Lukas demonstrated a deep care for working with young learners, which was evident throughout the session through his genuine engagement. His whole-hearted dialogue and presence made sure that each participant felt seen and important. The participants for this session were Ellis and Ed, along with Hannah and Jessie, creating an intimate and collaborative group dynamic, and was located in the 4's classroom.

Lukas designed the lesson around found object sculpture, drawing inspiration from the artist Louise Nevelson. He began by introducing himself, sharing his personal journey with art, and giving a brief but engaging introduction to Nevelson's work. He explained how her use of found and recycled materials heavily influenced his own artistic practice, immediately sparking the interest of both the children and adults. The open-ended nature of the found object sculpture allowed participants to explore materials freely, mirroring the playful and exploratory spirit

central to both Reggio Emilia and play-based philosophies. With no "correct" outcome expected, participants were invited to engage with the materials in a fun way, promoting creativity and experimentation. This unstructured, whimsical process also embodied the core principles of care theory, where play becomes a form of engrossment—an immersive, joyful state that fosters both self-care and care for others.

Throughout the session, the opportunities for collaborative play were abundant. Adults and children worked side by side, sharing materials, discussing their ideas, and inspiring one another. The physical act of creating together encouraged interaction, as participants naturally began to offer suggestions, ask questions, and share their artistic visions. Lukas' gentle guidance further reinforced this collaborative atmosphere, encouraging everyone to build on each other's creativity rather than focusing on individual outcomes.

The group was seated at one table and was fully immersed in the process of assembling their sculptures. The easy flow of conversation—whether discussing the textures of the materials, marveling at a completed structure, or simply exchanging ideas—created a collective sense of participation. The open dialogue fostered connection, as participants supported and inspired one another (Figure 15).

Figure 15

Dialogue Around the Table



Under Lukas's direction, the session became more than just an art lesson; it transformed into a shared creative experience where imagination and play intertwined. The group experienced a sense of "flow," a state of complete engagement where time seemed to dissolve as everyone became absorbed in the process of making (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). This environment, rich with interaction and collaboration, reinforced a sense of community, with artistic exploration as the glue for deeper connection. The session ended not just with completed sculptures, but with a palpable sense of togetherness and joy.

The following four sessions focus on Group B. These descriptions are more concise, as the lead artists and lessons were consistent across both groups. While I continue to provide an

overview video for each session, I have not included additional photos and videos here, as sessions five through eight are discussed in greater detail in the analysis section.

Session Five, April 1, 2022: Thank You for the Free Therapy

Figure 16

Session Five Overview Video



Ben returned to lead the fourth FAC session, marking the first meeting for the Group B participants. We gathered once again in the 4's classroom, welcoming Chandra and her dad Jack, Chris and his mom Kay, Ingrid and her mom Carmen, and Etta and her mom Sally. The familiar space, with its low tables and warm atmosphere, provided a comfortable backdrop for this new group of families.

Ben began the session much like he had with Group A, introducing himself and sharing his artwork, sparking curiosity and setting a welcoming tone. As he spoke about his creative process, and showed the different styles of paintings, the parents and children listened intently.

Everyone helped to distribute the paint brushes, water cups, and easels, a small but meaningful activity that fostered a sense of shared responsibility and collaboration right from the start. When it was time to begin working on the canvases, excitement filled the room.

The session unfolded as semi-structured studio time, with Ben providing guidance and encouragement while allowing everyone the freedom to explore their own creative ideas. The participants were deeply engaged, each child and parent focused on their canvases, experimenting with colors and textures. The room buzzed with a quiet hum of concentration, interrupted occasionally by bursts of laughter or a parent leaning over to offer a word of praise or encouragement to their child.

The atmosphere was calm and one parent, visibly relaxed and smiling, jokingly thanked Ben for the “free therapy session,” capturing the sense of ease and joy that filled the room. The children felt free to move around, pausing occasionally to munch on snacks, admire each other’s work, or play in the classroom. As they worked, the parents also began to connect- the artmaking bridged the gap between adults and children, new acquaintances and friends. By the end of the session, the room was filled with vibrant conversation, canvases and happy faces.

Session Six, April 22, 2022: Running in Circles of Care

Figure 17

Session Six Overview Video



Marley returned for session six, her third session overall and her first with Group B. The participants for this session included Chandra and her mom Emily, Chris and his mom Kay, Ingrid and her mom Carmen, Etta and her mom Sally, Oliver and his mom Mindy, and Lanie and her mom Kim. Given the larger group size, Marley and I decided to move the FAC downstairs into the spacious common room. This change altered the atmosphere slightly, as the larger space allowed for more movement and activity but also created a sense of physical separation with the tables set apart from one another. The room still buzzed with energy as the children loved the freedom to run and explore, taking full advantage of the new setting.

Despite the space feeling less intimate, the larger area offered plenty of room for the children and parents to spread out and engage with the clay materials. Marley introduced the group to the process of creating pinch pots and clay slabs, demonstrating the techniques with her characteristic patience and enthusiasm. She also brought a special addition: local clay she had gathered from a nearby creek. As she shared how to identify and collect clay from nature, the

group leaned in, fascinated by this connection to their local environment. This moment fostered a deeper sense of place-based learning, tying the creative process to the participants' surroundings.

Although the tables were initially set up separately, creating a slightly fragmented feel, participants still found ways to connect and interact. Children and parents moved freely around the room, observing each other's work and sharing ideas, their voices mingling with laughter and conversation. The openness of the space, while different from the cozier sessions upstairs, allowed for a dynamic flow of movement and dialogue, as participants navigated between the tables to engage with one another.

Recognizing the impact of the layout on the group dynamic, I decided to adjust for future sessions, ensuring that the tables would be pushed together to encourage a closer-knit atmosphere. By the end of the session, it was clear that, despite the initial challenges, the spirit of collaboration and creativity remained strong.

Session Seven, April 29, 2022: The Women at the Well

Figure 18

Session Seven Overview Video



Marley returned for session seven, her fourth session overall and second with Group B, bringing a sense of continuity and familiarity that had clearly strengthened the participants' connection to the FAC. This session included Chandra and her mom Emily, Chris and his mom Kay, Ingrid and her mom Carmen, Etta and her mom Sally, Oliver and his mom Mindy, and Lanie and her mom Kim. To take advantage of the beautiful day, we moved the FAC outside, setting up under the canopy of trees where the vibrant green of the surroundings seemed to amplify the sense of magic that had been building throughout the program.

The atmosphere was calm and inviting as both children and adults became fully absorbed in glazing their clay pieces. The natural setting and easy-going atmosphere created an environment where participants felt free to explore and express themselves. Children moved around easily, inspecting each other's work and sharing materials, while parents, seated around the tables together, engaged in conversations that ranged from their experiences in the FAC to stories of parenting and support.

Marley's gentle teaching approach nurtured this relaxed and open atmosphere, encouraging everyone to work at their own pace without pressure or judgment. Her approach allowed the children to experiment with the glazes and techniques, making decisions independently, while also inviting parents to participate in the creative process alongside their children. This shared experience fostered a sense of community, where helping each other, offering advice, and simply being present together became as much a part of the session as the artmaking itself.

Under the dappled sunlight, with the sounds of birds and rustling leaves creating a beautiful backdrop, the group worked together in a flow of creative energy and communal care. Parents exchanged stories, laughter, and words of encouragement. The children, meanwhile, moved around the space, alternating between artmaking and free play. The sense of belonging and connection was palpable, as if the boundaries between individual families had dissolved, replaced by a collective spirit of support and shared joy.

Session Eight, May 6, 2022: Everybody Loves Spoons

Figure 19

Session Eight Overview Video



The incredible Lukas returned for the final FAC session, bringing his warmth and enthusiasm to the group. This session, held in the common room, included Chandra and her mom Emily, Chris and his grandmother Virginia, Etta and her mom Sally, Oliver and his mom Mindy and younger brother James, and Lanie and her mom Kim.

Lukas began by introducing himself and sharing his artistic journey, explaining how Louise Nevelson's use of found objects had influenced his work. He captivated the group as he described the day's materials, including wooden pieces salvaged from a local spoonmaker's workshop, inviting participants to see the beauty in everyday items. His ability to connect with the children was evident as he engaged them in lively conversations, listening attentively to their thoughts and ideas, embodying Noddings' (1984) emphasis on genuine engagement in caring relationships.

Understanding the importance of a responsive learning environment, Lukas arranged the space to encourage exploration and collaboration, aligning with the Reggio Emilia philosophy of

the environment as a “third teacher” (Edwards et al., 2011). Play was woven into the lesson as participants eagerly ran back and forth, gathering found objects from across the room and turning the act of collecting materials into a playful adventure.

The diverse array of materials—wooden scraps, natural elements, and old piano parts—encouraged experimentation and creativity. Participants arranged and combined pieces in unexpected ways, embracing the process without the constraints of predefined outcomes. The atmosphere was vibrant and joyful, with children and parents fully immersed in their work, yet still engaging in conversation and shared laughter.

By the end of the session, the room was filled with imaginative sculptures and a sense of accomplishment. Lukas had not only guided the participants in creating art but also fostered a shared experience of exploration, collaboration, and connection. It was a fitting culmination of the FAC

The Role of Video in Knowledge Production

In this inquiry, video methods served as both a tool for data collection and a means of producing knowledge, offering participants the opportunity to reflect on their experiences. By revisiting key moments from the sessions through video-cued interviews, participants were able to provide fresh insights and interpretations that extended beyond initial observations, enriching the overall analysis and fostering a deeper understanding of their relational dynamics within the artmaking environment.

Drawing inspiration from Tobin's (2000) work on video ethnography in early childhood education, I aimed to use video not only to document the sessions but also to create knowledge that is accessible and aesthetically engaging. Tobin and Hsueh (2014) argue that more compelling and aesthetically pleasing videos can enhance social science research by encouraging

participants to reflect more deeply on their experiences. Similarly, Pink (2007) underscores the value of video in producing knowledge that moves beyond a purely scientific realist perspective, embracing a more reflective approach. Through the editing process, video became a form of analysis in itself, enabling me to learn from the interactions and generate new insights and findings. As O’Sullivan (2015) notes, the interpretation and representation of participants’ voices through video allows researchers to develop their own perspectives and construct new meanings.

Video-Cued Interviews and Revisiting Data

One of the key advantages of using video was the ability to revisit and reflect on data repeatedly. This revisiting enabled me to notice details of interactions that might have been overlooked during live observations, providing a more thorough analysis of social dynamics. It also allowed me, as a participant observer, to be present and engaged during the FAC sessions, as I knew I would be able to revisit the video footage. Furthermore, video methods allowed me to conduct video-cued interviews, providing parents the opportunity to reflect on and revisit their experiences. As Tobin and Hsueh (2014) suggest, “video in educational research should move beyond simple documentation and towards provoking self-reflection, challenging assumptions, and producing aesthetically engaging material that enriches the research process” (p. 77). Following this perspective, I conducted video-cued interviews with parents Sally, Carmen, Emily, and Kay which are discussed in detail in the following analysis chapter.

In Chapter Four, I will detail the video-cued interviews, the coding process, thematic development, and my reflexive approach to analysis. I will also introduce the findings and discuss the trustworthiness and ethical considerations of this inquiry. Together, these methods provided a robust framework for understanding the complex, dynamics of care at play within the

artmaking environment, highlighting how video can serve as a powerful tool for both knowledge production and thematic analysis.

CHAPTER 4

REFLEXIVE THEMATIC ANALYSIS

This chapter presents a detailed description of the data analysis procedures, and the analysis of the data collected through reflexive thematic analysis, with a particular focus on the insights gained from video-cued interviews. It delves into the themes and patterns from participants' experiences in the FAC, highlighting how care was manifested. Moreover, the chapter underscores the transparency of the analysis and ethical considerations in this inquiry, establishing a clear and reflexive approach to interpreting the findings.

This chapter begins by outlining the many (non-linear) layers of the data analysis process and procedures. I then outline how I employed reflexive thematic analysis to examine the data, highlighting the iterative coding and theme development process. The discussion then shifts to the codes and patterns observed through data analysis, encompassing the video-cued interviews, video recordings, and researcher notes and memos, each carefully examined to reveal the intricate ways care was expressed and perceived within the FAC setting. I present the developed themes and underscore their significance introducing the three major findings of research. Finally, the chapter addresses the trustworthiness and ethical considerations of the inquiry, including the measures taken to ensure credibility and integrity throughout the research process.

Data Analysis: A Layered Process

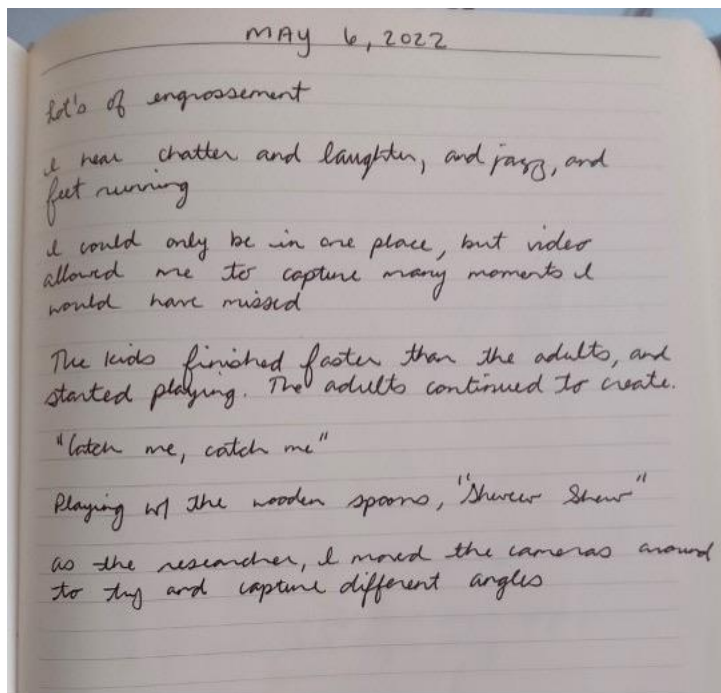
Admittedly, I initially felt unsure about how to tackle the analysis of the video component of my data, especially considering the significant volume of material. I was overwhelmed by over 16 hours of video footage and approximately 100 photos. Despite this

uncertainty, I recognized the importance of organizing the raw footage as a crucial first step. Consequently, I created eight folders on my laptop, each dedicated to a specific date of the FAC sessions. Once I had all the raw data organized, my next task was systematically reviewing it. There were many layers of this process:

1) To begin, I watched all the videos from each FAC session once through to gain familiarity with the content and assess the quality of each recording. I did not take detailed notes during this initial viewing but made some preliminary observations and impressions for reference. (see Figure 20).

Figure 20

Preliminary Notes from Viewing FAC Session Eight Video Footage



2. Following the initial viewing, I began observing and condensing the video content into shorter clips, organizing these clips into folders in iPhoto for each of the eight FAC Sessions.

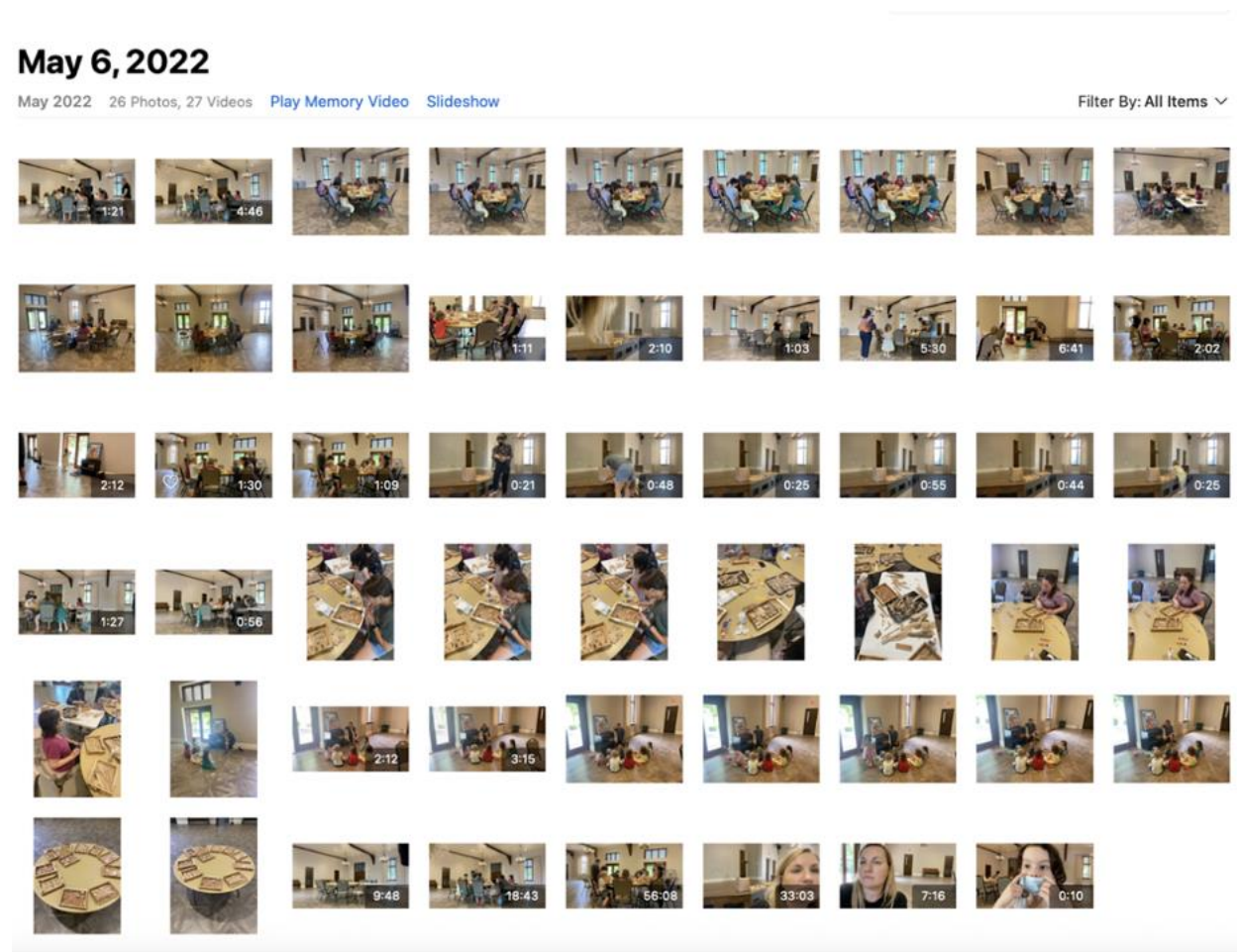
This initial condensing aimed to streamline the video footage and so that I could begin viewing the data with theory in mind. Many moments seemed significant for the study, but not all video footage provided equally valuable insights. Even though it was unnecessary to work in chronological order, I was still trying to decide which session to begin condensing and segmenting. I ended up starting with the last FAC session on May 6. I chose this last session for several reasons. First, Lukas, the artist leading this session, played a significant role in shaping the dynamics of the sessions. He was a great teacher, and you could tell he genuinely cares for the people around him and those he teaches. Also, since this was the last FAC, I had seven previous sessions benefiting from learning about the do's and don'ts in videoing, setting up tripods, etc. Therefore, the video content was more thorough and easier to watch from my perspective as the researcher.

3. As I proceeded with the video footage from May 6, my initial approach was to transcribe the entire FAC session. However, I soon recognized the impracticality of this task. With multiple participants speaking simultaneously and the setup of the tripods limiting my ability to capture everyone's conversations clearly, transcribing everything became unfeasible. I stopped transcription attempts and divided the videos into smaller segments. To guide this segmentation process, I kept my research question and the concepts of care close at hand. For the theoretical concepts of care, I created three additional folders on my computer for receptive and responsive attunement, engagement and dialogue, and engrossment. Using these concepts to think through the data, I watched the videos again and began creating clips ranging from around 20 seconds to two or three minutes long, which aligned with one of these concepts or stood out to me somehow. Although I approached my initial analysis of the video footage deductively, it is essential to note the importance of staying open-minded during the process, which keeps the

research engaging, and the possibilities open. Figure 21 shows a screenshot of my May 6 folder with the shorter segments beginning to form.

Figure 21

Screenshot of Video Segments in May 6th FAC Folder



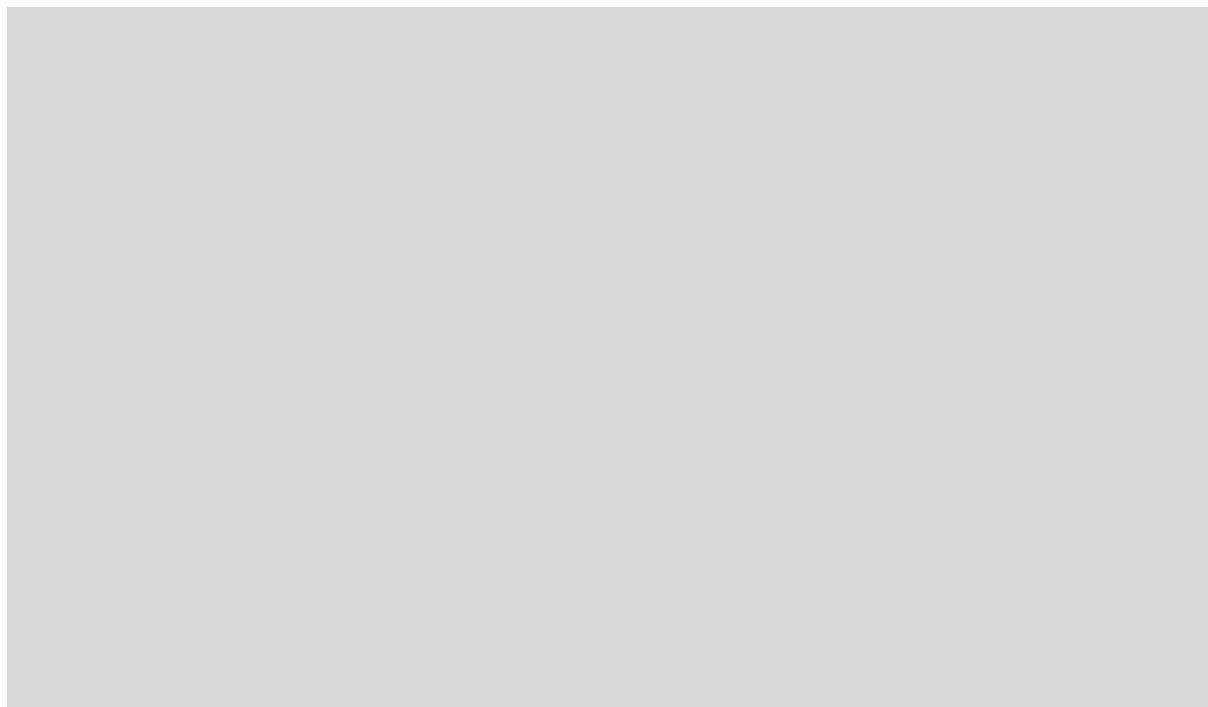
These clips were stored in iPhoto folders by either or both date and theoretical concept. Placing the video clips according to the corresponding theoretical concept while writing what was observed in my notebook helped me keep track of what I was witnessing and start noticing patterns in the data.

I repeated this process of segmenting the videos from each FAC, organizing the clips until I had thoroughly examined all footage from each of the eight sessions. From these video

clips, I pulled segments to share with participants during the video-cued interviews. I then created highlight reels for Groups A and B using these video clips, which were shared with the participants' families (Figure 22) A link to view the highlight video for Group B can be found here:

Figure 22

Group B Highlight Video



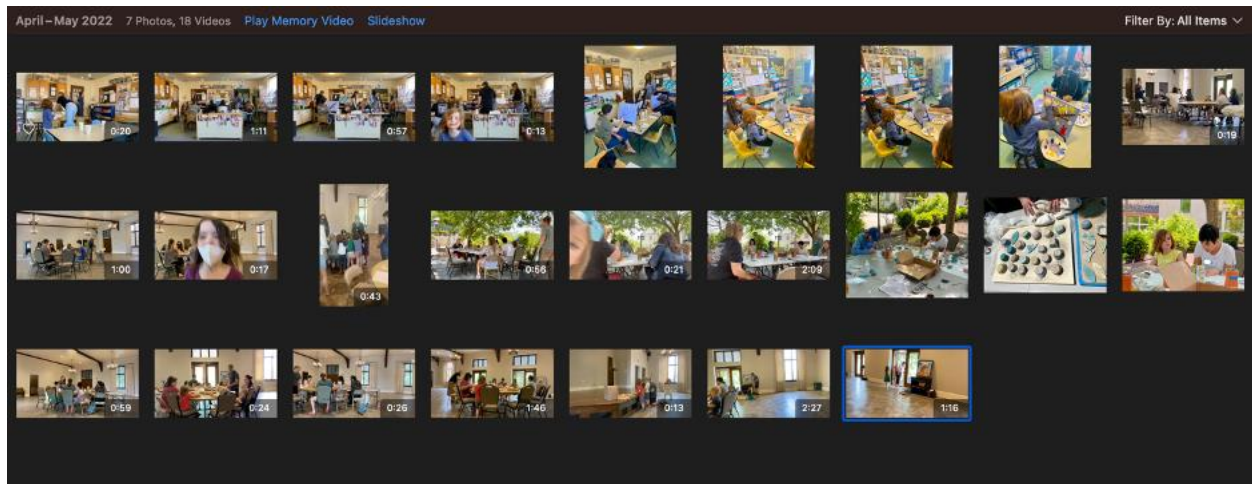
4. At this stage, I halted further condensing the video footage as I prepared for video-cued interviews. I contacted each parent who had participated in at least three of the four FAC sessions. Among Group A, two of three families met this criterion, and I attempted to schedule video-cued interviews with both families. Unfortunately, I did not receive responses from either. However, within Group B, all six families had attended at least three FAC sessions. I contacted them all and received responses from four families, enabling me to conduct four follow-up video-cued interviews with parents Emily, Sally, Kay, and Carmen.

5. To facilitate the video-cued interviews, I organized four folders in iPhoto for each participating family. These folders contained curated clips representing three central concepts of Noddings' (1984) ethics of care theory (receptive and responsive attunement, engagement and dialogue, and engrossment), along with a separate folder I created titled "JOY." The clips in the JOY folder captured moments I believed the families would enjoy, often showcasing the children interacting with the camera, singing, dancing, or engaging in playful activities.

6. Next, I scheduled and conducted the video-cued interviews via Zoom with Emily, Sally, Kay, and Carmen. To be clear, a video-cued interview is a research method where participants are shown video footage (usually of themselves or events they were involved in) and then asked to reflect on or respond to what they see. This technique prompts discussion, deepens understanding, and gains insights that might not emerge through traditional interviews or observation alone (Pink, 2007; Tobin, 2000). Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour. Before each interview, I ensured that the iPhoto folder for the respective parent contained at least three video clips from each session, selected from the initial deductive coding folders covering various aspects of the sessions, along with any relevant still photos (Figure 23).

Figure 23

Folder Prepared for the Video-Cued Interview with Emily



I utilized predefined interview questions (see Appendix --) and shared video clips and images to facilitate discussion during the interviews. These clips were prompts to evoke memories and reflections on their FAC experiences. An excerpt from the video-cued interview with Emily shares a glimpse into what occurred (Figure 24).

Figure 24

Excerpt from Video-Cued Interview



Although each interview varied slightly in its flow, the overarching framework involved sharing and discussing video clips from each session. The videos were crucial in eliciting conversation, as many months had transpired between the FAC sessions and the video-cued interviews. The video-cued interviews allowed me to tap into participants' memories and reflections, enriching the data collected by combining visual and verbal feedback.

7. After the interviews were conducted, I transcribed each interview in its entirety. Once the transcriptions were complete, I utilized ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis software, to upload the transcript documents. This tool was instrumental in visualizing key concepts (Figure 25). The next crucial step involved carefully reading the transcripts. This deep engagement with the material was essential for gaining a comprehensive understanding of the participants' memories, feedback, and reflections. This final step guided my transition to reflexive thematic

interactions, such as those captured on video during artmaking sessions. As Butler-Kisber (2018) points out, thematic analysis employs "a categorization approach for interpretation that produces a series of themes that emerge in the process of the research and account for experiences across groups or situations" (p. 11). This method effectively revealed the many situated dynamics interwoven in these settings. My choice of reflexive thematic analysis for this inquiry was driven by its flexibility in exploring complex, subjective experiences, such as concepts of care and creative experiences observed in the FAC setting. It allowed for an in-depth examination of participants' experiences and helped make sense of the observations of their interactions. Reflexive thematic analysis provides a framework that not only accommodates but also validates the messy, evolving nature of relationships and artmaking, ensuring that the complexities of these interactions are honored in the analysis process.

Reflexive thematic analysis, unlike more rigid forms of thematic analysis, places a strong emphasis on the researcher's active role in the analytic process. It recognizes that the researcher's insights, perspectives, and reflexivity are not just important, but integral to interpreting the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This approach encourages ongoing reflection and adaptation throughout the analysis process, making the researcher integral to the research process. By embracing reflexivity, this method enabled me to engage deeply with the data, recognizing the influence my knowledge and experience of being engaged in the FAC had on the analytical process.

Much analysis had already taken place, as I had already condensed and coded the FAC session recordings according to the concepts of engagement, engrossment, and attunement. To begin the next phase of my analysis using reflexive thematic analysis methods, I re-read the video-cued interview transcripts, continued watching and refining the video footage, and took detailed notes, coding throughout the process and identifying and labeling segments of the data

that appeared significant. This involved assigning descriptive codes to capture critical ideas, emotions, or patterns observed in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). When assigning descriptive codes to the transcripts, I was looking for concepts and expressions of care. For example, this step allowed me to recognize and label moments reflecting care, such as engrossment, connection and engagement between participants, and nurturing behaviors. Following this, I moved to generate initial themes by clustering related codes together, looking for overarching patterns of care- how participants demonstrated or experienced care through their artmaking and interactions (Figure 26).

Figure 26

Clustering Initial Themes



As a researcher, my role in shaping the analysis is both significant and inherently subjective. Reflexive thematic analysis requires acknowledging that the themes and interpretations I develop are influenced by my own perspectives, experiences, and biases. Throughout this process, I have been an active participant, making decisions about what to include, emphasize, and interpret based on my engagement with the data. My background, values, and theoretical framework inevitably guided the way I identified and constructed themes, as well as how I interpreted the participants' narratives and interactions. This subjectivity is not a limitation but rather an integral part of qualitative research, where the researcher's insights and reflexivity contribute to the richness and depth of the analysis (Braune & Clarke, 2022). Being reflexive meant continuously questioning how my assumptions, choices, and emotional

responses may have shaped the analytical process. It involved critically examining my own positionality and its impact on the research. By embracing this subjectivity, I aim to provide a transparent and honest account of how the findings were developed, recognizing that the analysis is a co-constructed interpretation that reflects both the participants' experiences and my interpretative lens (Figure 27).

Figure 27

Refining Themes- the Move to the Wall



After these initial themes were identified, the process of reviewing the themes took place. Some examples of the initial themes at this point were intentional time and playful engagement, art as a physical memory holder, and evolving practices of care. I went through many different

themes, revisiting the dataset, and making changes to make sure the data was accurately reflected. Once the themes had been refined, the next step was defining and naming the themes. This stage was crucial for articulating the scope and focus of each theme and ensuring that together they represented a coherent narrative of the data.

Themes and Patterns- Producing the Findings

Seven initial themes developed from the analysis, but I chose to prioritize three themes, not only because of the data supporting them but also because they aligned most closely with Noddings' ethics of care and the aim of this inquiry. These three themes are artmaking as a medium for engrossed and situated care, strengthening circles and chains of care through artmaking, and art as a tangible artifact for confirmations of care. According to Braun and Clarke (2022), "Theory always grounds and delimits data interpretation" (p. 196). By aligning and integrating these themes with Noddings' theoretical concepts, I aim to show how the FAC setting became a space where care was practiced and experienced in many ways, demonstrating how Noddings' ideas were lived out in the real-world interactions and experiences of the participants.

It is important to note that these themes went through many phases of evolution. As I examined the themes more deeply, I began to see how they reflected the broader processes and dynamics of care within the FAC. The themes were not isolated ideas but interconnected patterns across the dataset, each highlighting the unique role of artmaking in nurturing care in various dynamic forms. As I grouped and connected themes, they coalesced into overarching findings. For example, the 'intentional time for playful and mindful engagement' theme showed a consistent process where artmaking was a unique medium for deliberate connection, leading me to the broader finding of Artmaking as a Medium for Engrossed and Situated Care. Similarly, the

theme of ‘physical art as a tangible medium for memory’ evolved into finding art as a tangible artifact for Confirmation of care, as the participants experienced art as a form of confirmation and preservation of memories.

The findings are a result of a deeper, more interpretive layer of analysis that moves beyond description to offer insights into why these themes are significant to this inquiry’s research question and ethics of care theory. Braun and Clarke (2022) share how “Interpretation is the essentially human activity of working out what is going on” (p. 199). Interpretation is the meaning-making that is engaged in by the reflexive researcher. The findings were developed after a careful, iterative synthesis of the themes, but it is always inherently subjective; there is not a correct or singular interpretation of data (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 201). The themes showed how the individual and dyadic experiences of artmaking were part of a larger pattern of care that continued on long after the artmaking was finished, embodying key concepts such as engrossment, receptivity, and confirmation, as described in Noddings theory of care. I now share the three findings developed from this deep and thorough engagement in the analysis process.

The first finding, “Artmaking as a Medium for Engrossed and Situated Care, explores how artmaking, infused with dynamic opportunities to experience and practice care, creates a unique space for engaging interactions that nurture engrossment with the artmaking and the people. Example codes which supported the themes which led to finding one were embodied engagement and movement, playful exploration, non-verbal dialogue, physical interaction, and intentional time. The second theme, “Strengthening Circles and Chains of Care through Artmaking,” highlights how the FAC setting enabled parents and children to see each other and themselves in new and unexpected ways, revealing new possibilities for being together and nurturing the ripple effect of expanding circles and chains of care. Example codes which

supported the themes which led to finding two were Feeling less alone, connection and community, seeing their child in a new way, seeing themselves differently, and opportunities for unexpected forms of care. Finally, the theme of “Art as a Tangible Artifact for Confirmations of Care” emphasizes the role of tangible artworks in preserving shared experiences. It explores how these artworks served as powerful artifacts that encapsulate shared experiences and emotions and become a medium for participants to process these experiences and feelings. Example codes which supported the themes which led to finding three were remembering/memory through physical works of art, time to reflect on caregiving, agency/confidence, and confirmation.

As these findings took shape through the careful and reflexive process of interpretation, it was essential to ensure that the analysis was ethically sound and trustworthy. Braun and Clarke (2022) warn researchers against making the data fit their narrative, of moving too far away from the data, and how it is "about making sure that you're not shaping the data to tell *your* story, or smoothing over complexity to (mis)represent the stories in the data (p. 202). Qualitative research is about being immersed and intertwined. However, sometimes, this immersion clouds the way- it is critical to have strategies in place to maintain the trustworthiness and defensibility of the interpretations and findings. This was especially important considering the sensitive nature of the relationships explored in this inquiry and the necessity of preserving the authenticity of the participants' experiences as much as possible.

Trustworthiness

There were several strategies I undertook to ensure the trustworthiness of my analysis. For credibility, I had prolonged engagement with the data and used both methodological and data triangulation procedures. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2016):

These procedures, called triangulation, are considered a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning the use of multiple methods of data collection to achieve triangulation is important to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study" (p.154)

Triangulation increases the credibility and reliability of the findings. To achieve methodological triangulation, I used the research methods of video-cued interviews, observations, and researcher field notes to gather the data. To achieve data triangulation, I collected data from four separate parents and all FAC sessions, settings, and participants.

Regarding transferability, the findings from this inquiry, rooted in the unique context of an after-school FAC, carry potential transferability to other settings where artmaking is used to foster relationships and care. According to Braun and Clarke (2022), "Transferability refers to qualitative research that is richly contextualized in a way that allows the reader to make a judgment about whether, and to what extent, they can safely transfer the analysis to their own context or setting" (p. 143). Through detailed, thick descriptions of the interactions between parents, parents, children, and local artists, as well as sharing video recordings showing what took place, this inquiry provided a detailed account of how art can serve as a medium for nurturing individual and collective identities. While specific to the place and school setting, the universal themes of care, creativity, and relational growth suggest that similar outcomes could be achieved in other communities with shared values or goals. Additionally, the inquiry's emphasis on the reciprocal benefits of artmaking for both children and parents highlights practices that could be adapted by educators and community organizers in various cultural and geographical contexts. By offering concrete examples of how artmaking supported caring concepts from

Noddings' ethics of care, this research provides a valuable framework for others interested in implementing a similar program.

Ethical Considerations

Several ethical implications were carefully considered to ensure the integrity of the inquiry and the well-being of all participants during this research. These considerations included obtaining informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, and safeguarding the well-being of all participants. This was particularly important in the context of the video footage's visual and potentially sensitive nature and video-cued interviews. Informed consent was recorded ensuring all participants were aware of the study's purpose, procedures, and potential outcomes. Consent was obtained before the start of the FAC sessions, and participants were provided with detailed information about the nature of the research, the use of video recordings, and the right to withdraw from the FAC at any time. Participants were allowed to ask questions and clarify their concerns before agreeing to participate.

Considering the visual nature of the video footage and video-cued interviews, much attention was paid to ensuring the confidentiality of participants. Participants were informed how the video data would be stored, used, and shared in research outputs. Any video material that I used for analysis or presentations was anonymized where possible; personal identifiers were removed, and pseudonyms were used in all written reports.

In sum, in this chapter, I examined the key themes and patterns identified in the FAC, highlighting how artmaking served as a medium for caring concepts such as engrossment, dialogue, engagement, attunement, and confirmation. Through reflexive thematic analysis, these themes vividly illustrate how artmaking provided opportunities for the growth of caring relationships. These insights, firmly grounded in Noddings' ethics of care, underscore the role of

artmaking as a practice that not only strengthens individual relationships but also fosters a deep sense of connection and understanding of the community's needs. The following chapter will further explore and tell the stories of how these findings inform and extend existing understandings of care and artmaking. The findings will show not just that care occurred, but how it occurred—through intentional actions, engagement, and dynamics between participants.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

Thus, we keep our objective thinking tied to a relational stake at the heart of caring.

When we fail to do this, we can climb into clouds of abstraction, moving rapidly away from the caring situation into a domain of objective and impersonal problems where we are free to impose structure as we will. (Noddings, 1984, p. 36)

As a reflective researcher in the field of care, it has been imperative to recognize the inherent relational nature of caregiving. Understanding that care involves dynamic interactions between individuals and their contexts is fundamental to conducting meaningful research. Emphasizing the need to strike a balance between objectivity and empathy, this quote from Noddings underscores the importance of grounding this analytical approach in an appreciation for human experiences and relationships central to care. As I share the findings of this inquiry on care, I aim to listen to Nodding's caution against abstraction and detachment and instead maintain a connection to the lived realities of care, avoiding the pitfall of reducing it to theoretical constructs or "clouds of abstraction". This perspective will ensure the relevance and applicability of these research findings to real-world contexts and provide actionable and valuable insights for practitioners and caregivers alike.

With that being said, this chapter presents the findings of my reflexive thematic analysis through the lens of Nel Noddings' ethics of care theory. In the sections that follow, I answer my research question, how are caring relationships nurtured among young learners and families through artmaking with local artists in an after-school art club? Throughout this discussion, I

consider the theoretical concepts of care theory foundational in this study—engrossment, engagement, and attunement— and explain how these constructs influenced my understanding of the caring relationships and dynamics observed in the data. The findings will reflect how these concepts were present in the FAC and how other caring concepts, such as confirmation and chains of care, unfolded. Through the analysis of participants' experiences and reflections in the FAC, several key noticing's also developed that reflect the core elements of expanding the caring ideal, as outlined by Noddings: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. The findings highlight how artmaking facilitated creative expression and nurtured caring relationships, allowing both children and adults to experience and expand their capacity for care in intentional, meaningful ways. Each thematic finding is discussed separately, but it's important to note that the findings are tightly interwoven and often overlap or share more than one concept, just like the circuitous nature of care, posing challenges for what can be considered complete understanding.

The main findings which were produced from the thematic analysis are:

1. Artmaking as a Medium for Engrossed and Situated Care
2. Strengthening Circles and Chains of Care through Artmaking
3. Art as a Tangible Artifact for Confirmations of Care

Throughout the discussion of the findings, videos are included to provide further understanding and context. By linking video clips throughout, the reader can engage more deeply with the dataset, experiencing the interactions and moments that support the findings drawn in the inquiry.

Finding One - Artmaking as a Medium for Engrossed and Situated Care

This finding demonstrates how artmaking in the FAC provided rich opportunities for engrossed and situated care. The immersive nature of the creative process was a critical factor in fostering deep engrossment and connection between participants, whether it was an established relationship, such as parent and child, or if they had just met, such as an artist and child. The situated nature was observed in the interactions between the participants, as artmaking served as a bridge to both deepen existing relationships and serve as icebreakers or entry points for establishing new relationships. The artmaking process's immersive and attentive nature formed the foundation of care in the FAC setting.

When I use the term "situated care," I refer to Noddings' (1984; 2002) emphasis that care is always relational and contextual and is not a one-size-fits-all approach; "the objectives of care shift with the situation and also with the recipient" (2002, p. 20). When care is situated, it adapts to the specific needs and context of the moment which becomes a crucial element in shaping how care is nurtured and expressed. The adaptability of situated care reassures that care can be viewed as fluid and responsive to the unique circumstances and relationships present in any given moment. The flexibility of artmaking as an activity allows care to adjust to the setting and to the needs and emotions of the individuals involved, reinforcing Noddings' concept of the relational and situated nature of care. Noddings (2002) explains how "the attributes or characteristics (of care) are temporal, elusive, subjective to distraction, and partly constituted by the behavior of the partners in caring" (p. 13). Artmaking in the Club embodied this temporality—care was not static but responded to the needs and interactions of the participants in real-time. Through the different elements of shared artmaking processes, participants were able to express and experience a variety of situated, context-specific opportunities for care through

physical embodiment, dialogue, receptivity, and presence which are discussed in the following sections.

Engrossed Embodiment

The physicality of artmaking (working with clay, using your hands to create and share) is not just a tactile experience but becomes an embodied form of care. Art materials and tactile interactions become tools for engrossment, whereby physical interaction with materials and one another nurtures relational closeness. A core concept of Noddings (1984/2013), she states explicitly how "all caring involves engrossment" (p. 17), and engrossment requires a higher level of intention and being fully present. In this context, the art materials became vehicles for participants to become fully engaged in both the creative activity and with one another. Hamington (2004) explains this as a form of embodiment in which "Care is a way of being in the world that the habits and behaviors of our body facilitate. Care consists of practices that can be developed or allowed to atrophy" (p. 2). Therefore, artmaking can become a process for avoiding atrophy and developing long-lasting and deeply felt habits. The FAC was a space where physical engagement was not just about making art but about practicing embodied care through the simple acts of making, sharing, collaborating, and being present for one another as an integral part of what is going on. The physical process of making art and the tactile experience of working together became a tangible form of care and provided opportunities for care to be expressed through actions: a parent guiding a child's hands while molding clay or a child offering a brush to a friend. In Figure 28 we can see this engrossment in the following video depicting a parent guiding a child's hands while molding clay or as a child offers a brush to a friend.

Figure 28

Engrossment in Action



In the video, Jessie, Hannah, Abby, and Will can be seen working on their clay slabs. Jessie shows Hannah how to brush the crumbs off the clay, and they collaboratively engage in shaping and designing their pieces. Will also brushes the crumbs from his clay, and you can hear him saying, "Oh, that was cool," expressing his delight in what he is making. From the perspective of Jessie and Abby, their engagement with artmaking and with their children's models and teachers. From the perspective of Hannah and Will, they are experiencing care while at the same time "practicing" and developing habits of care. The 'practicing' is critical here, as Noddings tells us, "Practice in caring is a form of apprenticeship" (1984, p. 122)– the physical and repetitive nature of creating together actively builds and strengthens the behaviors and habits necessary for ongoing, situated care. Noddings reminds us that she does not use the term practice lightly, as "there is a dimension of competence in caring . . . it is important to recognize that there are skills" (p. 122-123). Artmaking plays a crucial role in this process, providing a space

for the development of caring habits. The habit of artmaking prevents atrophy by encouraging opportunities for participants to engage with one another in meaningful, caring ways.

Carmen reflected on this physicality in her experience working alongside her daughter, Ingrid. She noted:

In terms of connecting over the project itself, I think that the clay lent itself more to that because we literally had all four of our hands on it to some degree, like the little piece that she's got. And we did some (clay pieces), I remember doing a handful, and some she did by herself and I did by myself. And then we had a couple that we worked on together. So, I think that was nice.

The physical interaction of making with the clay allowed Carmen and Ingrid to connect through the collaborative and tactile process. The literal act of having "all four of our hands on it" was not only a way to engage with the art but also a way to connect on a deeper, relational level, suggesting a form of engrossment where both Carmen and Ingrid were deeply absorbed in working the clay together with their hands. Unlike other activities, artmaking requires physical engagement, shared focus, and creative decision-making, which uniquely facilitates a deeper sense of presence in the moment.

Earlier in the interview, in Figure 29, Carmen discussed Ingrid's love language of physical touch. The activity of working with clay led to moments of physical connection not only with Carmen and Ingrid in the right-hand corner but with Chris and his mom, Kay.

Figure 29

Love Language



Carmen reflected on how this cuddling was unique to Carmen and Ingrid's bond and said it had been like that since day one, but she explained how her other two children do not seek out that physical connection of cuddling. She reflected:

She wants that connection, that physical connection. And it's interesting because she definitely has an enthusiasm for physical art, and she's got big, deep feelings and all that. And it's so interesting to me that she's also very physical. You know what I mean? I'm like, that's got to be tied together, that connection of it.

Carmen's reflection highlights how physical closeness was embodied in the shared artmaking process, with her engrossment and attunement to Ingrid's needs intertwining with their creative

collaboration as a form of care. Carmen was fully present, both emotionally and physically, responding to what Ingrid needed in that moment as they worked together.

Another example of physical closeness with Hannah and her mom, Jessie is seen in the following video clip in which their hands were constantly intertwined throughout the pinch pot making process, sharing back and forth, problem-solving, and working together (Figure 30).

Figure 30

Hannah and Jessie Make a Pinch Pot



While Noddings' work may not explicitly delve into the physicality of care in terms of physical closeness, she does underscore the significance of being present. This concept often involves physical proximity. In the case of Carmen, Ingrid, Hannah, and Jessie, the physical closeness demonstrated while making art together supports the importance of developing secure attachments through active support and presence. This attentive presence is the definition of engrossment, where the one-caring becomes fully attentive to the needs of the cared-for (Noddings, 1984, 2013). Being physically close, using touch, and creating together was a powerful means of expressing care.

Hammington (2004) also explores the concept of embodied care, noting how "The body's physical experience of the world provides certain structures of understanding" (p. 73). This idea that our physical experiences shape our understanding of care resonates with my observations. The physicality involved in artmaking, particularly sharing materials and engaging through the senses, can deepen emotional bonds. By providing a space for this embodied experience, the FAC contributed to a tangible form of embodied care through physical closeness and tactile experience. The physical process of making art and the tactile experience of working together became a tangible form of care. This shared physical engagement and shared experience of creating provided opportunities for care to be expressed through actions: a parent guiding a child's hands while molding clay or a child offering a brush to a parent while painting.

Dialogue

Connected to and overlapping with physical embodiment the data clearly showed how artmaking can serve as a medium for encouraging verbal and non-verbal dialogue. According to Noddings (1984/2013), "dialogue and practice are essential in nurturing the caring ideal" (p. 123). During FAC, non-verbal dialogue took the form of actions such as passing materials,

working, and playing together, allowing children and caregivers to communicate care in a way where words were not always necessary. This process builds on 'the ethical ideal,' a concept Noddings (1984) defines as 'that vision of best self' (p. 80), which guides our actions and decisions in caring relationships. Artmaking is not just about creating a product but about engaging in a process where participants speak to each other through actions, decisions, and shared experiences, celebrating one another. In Figure 31, participants speak in different ways. The following video shows the participants' speaking in different ways.

Figure 31

Examples of Dialogue



Here, Etta, Sally, Lanie, and Emily can be seen in the background working together and sharing materials, making creative decisions, and being engrossed in the artmaking process alongside one another. Chandra then walks over to observe Oliver's artwork, "speaking" to him

through her presence and attention while Lukas offers his support through presence and observation. Lastly, Chandra and Chris respond and play with one another illustrating how care is profoundly relational and context specific. The playful interactions became a way of grounding care in the immediate moment, reflecting its situated nature.

Artmaking is a powerful tool, providing unique opportunities for 'speaking' in diverse ways. This form of relational engagement is particularly beneficial for individuals who are shy or non-verbal, allowing care to be experienced and expressed through the process of co-creating and caring in subtle yet powerful ways. A striking example of this shared dialogue through artmaking was observed in the sessions with Ellis, a child who was often shy and quiet. During the collaborative activities, Ellis and his father, Ed, communicated by passing paints and wood pieces and helping each other through the process. The entire table, Ellis included, was engaged in a profound 'conversation' through their art, as seen in Figure 32.

Figure 32

Speaking in Different Ways



The playful, hands-on nature of the activities encouraged Ellis to open-up, not just non-verbally but verbally as well. Additionally, their assemblage pieces, combining individual creative expression and shared effort, visually represented their connection and developing dialogue through the placement and arrangement of the wood scraps. (Figure 33).

Figure 33

Ellis and Ed's Assemblage Collaborations



Another example of dialogue, shown in Figure 34, illustrates 'the ethical ideal,' or the vision of one's best self, through Lukas's contributions during the final artmaking session. Towards the end of the session, Lukas gathered the children to share a personal artwork he had brought, titled *Angelfish*. The artwork, dedicated to his mother, reflected his values of love and respect. In the video, he explained, 'This painting is about my mother, because even when you're grown up, you still love your mother,' adding, 'I did this painting to honor my mother because she is super important to me. That's why I called it my Angelfish.' Lukas embodied the ethical ideal through his thoughtfulness and meaningful engagement. He involved the children in dialogue by asking what they saw and thought about his artwork, fostering collaboration and reflection. He connected his artwork to their lesson on assemblage sculpture, explaining his use of upcycled wood pieces and sharing how his caring relationship with his mother inspired his artwork.

Also, Lukas respected the children's freedom, allowing them to move around and share their thoughts with him and their peers without interruption. Through authentic dialogue—listening attentively, using an encouraging tone, and asking follow-up questions—Lukas modeled openness and patience. For example, he asked questions like, 'When you were at that table, what were you sitting on?' or 'Do you see a chair in here?' This thoughtful dialogue went beyond simply sharing his own thoughts; he actively invited the children to share their observations and interpretations. This back-and-forth created an environment of mutual respect where the children's voices were valued.

Figure 344

My Angelfish



Artmaking served as a medium for shared dialogue, creating opportunities for participants to communicate not only through spoken words but also through nonverbal

expressions—whether through play, painting, or other hands-on artistic activities—allowing participants to communicate in ways where words were not always necessary. These examples demonstrate how small and straightforward acts in artmaking can serve as a powerful form of caring dialogue in Noddings’ framework, serving as a bridge for deeper engrossment. The shared creative process becomes a dialogue of its own, where participants could express feelings and communicate in a way that responded to and validated one another. This back and forth, listening and responding, exemplifies the receptive and reciprocal nature of care, moving us to the next example of artmaking as a medium for engrossed and situated care. Unlike other activities, artmaking requires physical engagement, shared focus, and creative decision-making, which uniquely facilitates both non-verbal dialogue and a deeper sense of presence in the moment.

Receptivity

Receptivity is a form of deep openness which can include an openness to another person, an idea, or the experiences around us. According to Noddings (1984/2013):

It is in the relaxation of detached and objective self, in this engrossment, that the one-caring assumes her full individuality in relatedness. The child who retains his receptivity can lose himself not only in others for whom he becomes one-caring, but also in ideas and objects. (p. 60)

In the context of caring relationships, Noddings highlights how, for the one-caring, this means being open to the cared-for’s needs and emotions, letting go of the self, and becoming engrossed in the person or situation they are caring for. Children, through experiencing receptivity, are more likely to cultivate an openness to engaging with the creative process and with those around them.

Several examples of receptivity as situated care were observed in the FAC. The first interesting observation was receptivity in letting go of control. Parents learned to step back from controlling the process, allowing children creative freedom. In this way, instead of stepping in or giving critical feedback, they remained receptive to their child's creative choices, letting the artmaking process unfold naturally. For the child, this allows for autonomy to grow and to feel seen and supported. For example, after watching video clips from the painting session with Ben, Carmen reflected, "And then I was looking over at her canvas, I could tell that I was trying not to give any critical feedback . . . Trying to let her have fun and enjoy that process" (12:52). This conscious receptivity (or restraint) allowed for a deeper level of engrossment, with Carmen supporting Ingrid while remaining engaged in the process. Kay also reflected similar remembrances when she exclaimed:

Well, I'm proud of myself for not being too much of a control freak and telling them, that's one thing that I think is hard. Sometimes when you're doing an art project or baking or anything with creativity, you have a vision. But kids, I love it because they think outside of the box. Like, I was just kind of doing the pictures that he (Ben) showed us, and Chris was just doing his own thing. And to let them just be creative and do their own thing, sometimes it's hard in the moment, but then you're always thankful you did.

By being receptive and encouraging the exploration of materials and ideas, parents play a crucial role in fostering creativity in their children. They can think through their reactions more fully, be intentional with their responses, and be less reactive. This not only acknowledges that sometimes caring is letting go, but also offers opportunities for both parent and child to appreciate each other's contributions and presence in the moment. These examples further illustrate Noddings' concept of engrossment, where being fully present allows for deeper relational engagement.

Another example is found in my observations of playful exploration and receptivity of the art materials, leading to a state of flow where parents and children were deeply engrossed in the activity and the experience. For example, the following video of the participants creating their assemblage sculptures shows how they are not rushing but are slowing down, taking their time to create, engaging with one another, and letting the art materials guide their creative process. The sense of accomplishment at the end of the process was palpable and rewarding (Figure 35).

Figure 35

Receptive and Engrossed Flow



Lastly, receptivity was observed in the form of mutual problem-solving. During the second artmaking session with Marley, a collaborative problem-solving process was observed. Sally and Etta were choosing their glaze colors and discussing how they would paint their ceramic pieces. Etta was disappointed that there was no pink glaze, but Sally let Etta approach the challenge and take the lead in moving forward. Instead of imposing a solution, Etta and Sally collaborated to explore alternatives, leading to a positive outcome. Etta happily moved on to choose blue and yellow (Figure 36), a testament to the success of their joint problem-solving. Instead of rushing through the project, they frequently paused to look at each other's work, suggesting that the process fostered receptive care between Sally and Etta through thoughtful engagement and engrossment. This example is an essential demonstration of care and the value and respect of others' ideas. Arguments have been made against the power dynamics inherent in caring relationships (Hoagland, 1990), and as Ryan (2021) underscores, "Noddings, Tronto, and van Manen all accept that their models of caring are asymmetrical. Children are not responsible for their parents or teachers, and adults have a particular kind of responsibility towards children" (p. 45). What could unfold when parental care and responsibility intersect with creativity and play? This example illustrates that artmaking and creative decision-making create a space and a process where "all are equal, yet diversely unique participants, with equal power" (p. 45). While this example might seem like a tiny glimmer, it paves the way for a version of care where respect for others' ideas is supported and a mutual flow (or reciprocity) of care is fostered. In a parent-child relationship, achieving this equal power dynamic is not always possible; however, it is critical to recognize these moments where giving up control and valuing children's voices and choices is of utmost importance.

Figure 366*Etta and Sally Glaze Their Ceramic Pieces*

Artmaking was situated in a way that offers children opportunities to take on caregiving roles. For example, in the video footage, I observed children being receptive to others by affirming one another's artwork. In one instance, Chris called Etta and her mother, Sally, over to look at his artwork. Etta quickly came over, observed Chris's work, and responded with 'All right!', offering Chris confirmation. Similarly, during the painting session, I observed Ingrid and Chandra (ages four and five), who were seated beside one another, encouraging each other as they painted and sharing how much they liked each other's work. These moments of encouragement seemed to mirror the receptive and affirming behaviors modeled by Ben and the parents around them. These opportunities to practice receptivity cultivated an openness to engage with both the creative process and those around them. Through artmaking in a nurturing, free

environment, children had opportunities to share their ideas and feelings and practice communicating and connecting with others.

Intentional Presence

The data overwhelmingly pointed to how artmaking became a medium for intentional time and active presence, aligning with the idea that care is not just about words or intentions but about the actions taken and the time invested in being present for others. When caregivers intentionally set aside time to be physically and emotionally present and engaged, an environment is fostered where young children feel seen, listened to, and valued. Noddings posits how a "child genuinely cared for is free to respond as himself, to create, to follow his interests without unnecessary fear and anxiety" (p. 72). This emphasizes critical aspects of the FAC's goals- providing a space where parents could be actively present and children felt safe, confident, and free to express themselves. However, the concept of active presence involves more than being physically together; it requires ongoing, engrossed participation, in this case, in artmaking. For young children, this active, intentional time and presence is critical for developing secure attachments (Kennedy, 2022; Komisar, 2017; Noddings, 1984, 2002). Here, artmaking served as more than a creative activity; it became an adaptive and situated space for relational care and attachment, where the participants felt comfortable blooming and growing.

A key pattern all parents reported during the video-cued interviews was the appreciation for intentional time with their children during the FAC. Every parent I interviewed was reminiscent and nostalgic when watching the video footage from the FAC in the video-cued interviews. Each commented on how much their children had changed in the two years since the FAC had happened and when we had our video-cued interviews. While art can remain a valuable form of expression and connection throughout life (and as an art educator, we aim to foster that),

its role in early childhood is particularly impactful. The early childhood years are a “golden age of creativity, a time when every child sparkles with artistry (Gardner, 1980, p. 86), and it is important for parents to foster enthusiasm for the arts. In support of this view, Jalongo and Stamp (1997) explain:

Sadly, the level of artistry that peaks during the preschool years resurfaces later in only a few children and adults. Creative behavior is greatly affected by attitudes, and adults can exert a powerful, positive influence on what the child feels, thinks, and acts upon in regard to the arts. That influence is even more powerful when families collaborate. (p. 115)

Carmen reflected on this collaboration, and how the FAC gave them special time to do something they both loved, saying, "Ingrid loves art and she loves making things, and I do, too. So I think it was special to have that set aside time where we got to do something together that we both enjoyed" Carmen's reflection on her and Ingrid's shared love of artmaking reinforces and expands Noddings' idea of relational care and how they both were engrossed in the shared creative experiences, strengthening their emotional bonds. Caring is not abstract—it is lived, experienced, and expressed through the body- here, the act of creation became a way to express and receive care and be engrossed and present. Care is not static- it adapts, changes, and shifts according to each person's developmental needs. Artmaking allows parents to be attuned to their child's unique stage of development, whether it is playful, unstructured exploratory making with younger children or more structured guidance with older children. In this way, artmaking provides a flexible and situational way to express and receive care attuned to individual needs. Again, this is especially important in early childhood when children form their first understandings of themselves and their relationships with others; This is why Noddings reminds

us that early childhood is a critical period for learning to care about others and to be cared for, thus building the foundations of the caring ideal.

Being actively present is a big part of being intentional about artmaking. All the parents I interviewed appreciated the intentional time, as it offered a rare opportunity to slow down and escape the everyday rush. The parents who participated in the FAC decided to spend time with their children and the other participants, creating the conditions for engrossing experiences. Kay reinforced this by explaining, "To have that time intentional, where I did not have to think about it. It was all planned and carved out for us; that was a great thing." The FAC was a relaxed and supportive environment where participants could slow down, be present, and connect by exploring materials. This imperative nature of time was discussed with Sally when she expressed gratitude for her one-on-one time with Etta, her middle child, during these sessions, sharing:

So often, that means she's (Etta) probably the last one to get one-on-one time with the parent because she kind of coasts along. So, I loved being able to have that time where it was like, *I'm just here with you, and we're focusing on an activity for us to do together without your siblings.*

Sally's reflection on spending intentional time with her daughter, "I am just here with you, and we're focusing on an activity for us to do together without your sibling" holds significance. This deliberate setting aside of time enabled parents to be more attuned to their children's unique needs and emotional states. From the researcher's perspective, I could see how Etta thrived in the active presence and artmaking time with her mom. Being a somewhat shy and reserved child, it was encouraging to see her bloom in the FAC space (Figure 37).

Figure 377

Expressions of Etta



The space and time to create and be together without siblings opened space for parent and child's relationship to grow in new ways. This aligns with Dr. Becky Kennedy, a renowned clinical psychologist and mother of three, insights who emphasizes the importance of individualized parent-child interactions. Dr. Kennedy's approachable style of sharing research-backed parenting advice, which I appreciate, stresses that even ten minutes of focused attention from a parent can contribute to family harmony. She explains how "ten minutes of one-on-one time with a parent does more for family peacefulness than anything else" (Cup of joe.com, 2021).

Joanna Goddard (2021) further delves into Dr. Becky's philosophy, highlighting the concept of "attachment security" and explaining how, according to Dr. Becky, "it all goes back to "attachment security"... which is essentially how safe and secure each child feels within the family. How seen do I feel? Do I have a place in this family? Do I feel appreciated for who I am?" (Cup of joe.com). Attachment theory underscores the crucial role of caregivers in building

solid relationships with children, providing a secure base from which children can explore the world. Spending intentional, quality time with children, where caregivers are fully engaged, helps to cultivate this sense of security, building the foundation for healthy attachment relationships (Siegel, 1999). Noddings' concept of attunement shares many similarities with attachment theory; her perspective underscores the idea that the quality of time spent with children is crucial, such as the quality, intentional time spent in FAC, emphasizing the importance of authenticity and genuine care in parent-child relationships rather than merely focusing on the quantity of time spent together.

It is particularly important to take advantage of intentional artmaking opportunities in early childhood because this is when children are naturally inclined towards exploration and play. As children grow older, for many, engagement with art and play will inevitably change, as the natural inclination to play and explore often diminishes, replaced by more structured, product-oriented approaches to art making, and also as other responsibilities and interests emerge. By fostering these intentional and playful interactions early on, caregivers can create memories and establish a caring practice that builds on the caring ideal. Emily poignantly reflected:

It did make me think, watching the clips, how different it would be if Chandra and I did that exact same FAC when she's in fifth grade or when she's in high school. It would look so different, and I don't know if I would get something different out of it. Right, because your relationship with your kids are different at each age. But it just made me think about how different age groups absorb these kinds of experiences. Because I am sometimes hard on myself. Like, we didn't sit down together, and did we bond over that? Well, little kids can't sit still. They're not going to bond that way. Like my 14-year-old, if she was

having a rough day, we'd have a cup of tea or hang out together, go for a walk with the dogs, and talk it out. Whereas with Chandra, it's so totally different. So I don't know.

Watching these clips of the class makes me think, like, just everything is so dependent on that age group and where their brains are.

Emily's reflection on how it would be to experience FAC with Chandra at various stages of life, underscores the importance of artmaking in early childhood. This is important here, reflecting on how relationships change, and time goes by quickly accentuating how precious time is with their children and how artmaking provided a time for being together.

Every parent I interviewed was reminiscent and nostalgic when watching the video footage from the FAC in the video-cued interviews. Each commented on how much their children had changed in the two years since the FAC had happened and when we had our video-cued interviews. While art can remain a valuable form of expression and connection throughout life (and as an art educator, we aim to foster that), its role in early childhood is particularly impactful. This is when children form their first understandings of themselves and their relationships with others. This is also why Noddings reminds us that early childhood is a critical period for learning to care about others and to be cared for, thus building the foundations of the caring ideal. By intentionally taking advantage of this critical period, parents can also foster a deep appreciation for creativity and connection that has the possibility of influencing their developmental paths long after they leave the FAC. The long-term impact of these early childhood art activities is a source of hope and inspiration for parents, educators, and researchers alike.

Finding Two- Strengthening Circles and Chains of Care through Artmaking

Artmaking within the FAC gave participants an opportunity to connect on multiple levels—with themselves, within their families, with other families, and with local artists—forming and strengthening collective chains of care that stretched beyond the immediate dyadic relationships. Noddings (1984/2013) concept of "circles and chains of care" refers to the idea that caring is a relational practice that starts from the self and extends outward, linking individuals together in a care network. Noddings explains how 'circles of care' refers to the immediate relationships, such as between a parent and child, where care is reciprocated. Each person is at the center of their own circle. 'Chains of care' occur when care is extended beyond the immediate circles, creating a ripple effect as it extends outward into other relationships and communities. Each act of caring fosters further caring, creating a ripple effect where the cared-for person, in turn, becomes a caregiver, continuing the chain. The data confirmed many instances of both care within the circles, and the extension of care outward, forming chains. This finding shows how the FAC setting enabled parents and children to nurture this ripple effect seeing each other and themselves in new and unexpected ways, revealing possibilities for being together and equally as important, for children to be active participants in both circles and chains of care. Through their time in the FAC, parents reported discovering aspects of their children's abilities and personalities that they had not seen before. For the children, their interactions in the artmaking process—whether it was sharing materials, offering help, or modeling behaviors learned from their caregivers—gave them practice in, and helped to demonstrate, their understanding of care as a reciprocal and expansive process. These revealing moments redefined how the parents and children related to each other and highlighted the potential for future

interactions. Care is not static; it evolves as the needs and capacities of the caregiver and the cared-for change.

Another important part of this expansion of care was the experience of parents coming together as a community within the FAC. The shared environment allowed parents to connect, strengthening these chains of care, reducing feelings of isolation, and fostering a deep sense of belonging. Through informal conversations, shared creative activities, and mutual support, parents reported finding solace in being part of a group that understands the challenges and joys of raising young children. The FAC space helped parents feel less alone and more supported. The artmaking sessions provided not only a space for parents to be with their children in new and meaningful ways but also a place to be with other parents, building a supportive community where everyone felt included and valued.

Finding New Ways to Care

Early in the video-cued interview, I asked Carmen what caring meant to her, as a mother.

Carmen explained how she thinks of caring as seeing. She responded:

I think seeing each of my kids individually and really understanding who they are and what makes them tick. And what makes them unique and trying to see things as they see them, see the world as they see it, and understand their perspective, I think, is the best way that I can care for them... when I think of taking care, I think that requires a lot of noticing. What does this person need and how do I know? And if I don't know, what do I need to pay attention to? So, I think it's a lot of noticing and seeing.

From Carmen's perspective, caring for her children involves renewed and deep understanding and acknowledgment of their individuality. She views caring as synonymous with 'seeing' her children, not just physically but also in recognizing their unique personalities, perspectives, and

needs. For Carmen, this meant trying to understand how her children perceive the world and what matters to them. The FAC activities provided Carmen with a unique insight into Ingrid's creative expression and interactions with others. In the following video clip (Figure 38), several types of care are evident. First, Ingrid and Chandra place art materials on the tables together, an example of children supporting peers and their growing ability to care for others in their environment. Second, Carmen walks calmly and slowly around them, witnessing silly moments of the girls interacting with the camera but not interfering with what they are doing.

Figure 38

Ingrid, Chandra, and Carmen During FAC, April 1, 2022



By observing without interference, Carmen acknowledges their autonomy. This kind of non-intrusive “seeing” helps extend the chains of care through nurturing a safe, attentive environment where creativity and interactions could flourish. By stepping back and seeing, parents can 'care' differently by appreciating their child's individuality and seeing them not as a

child but as unique and in doing so fostering a new understanding of their potential. From the child's perspective, the video offers a powerful visual of how children contribute to and shape the chain of care within their immediate relationships and beyond, extending care outward into the broader group of the FAC. For example, in the following video you will see all the children running and playing (Figure 39).

Figure 389

Running in Circles of Care



If you know what to look for, you will see more than just running and playing occurring. As Jalongo and Stamp (1997) wisely explain, "What the children are learning in and through art activities is not always obvious to the uninitiated because most of what the children are doing looks like play" (p.37). The FAC activities and space provided a safe environment for children to express their emotions and build trust with one another. During their play interactions, such as running in circles together, children practice caring behaviors like empathy and acceptance,

extending care beyond their immediate group. Wasserman (2023) shares how, “the development and nurturing of the more self-directed child come from their engagement in play-the primary avenue of development that provides them with the greatest opportunities for inner direction. No one must tell them what to do, how to do it, and how much time they have to do it in” (p. 19). This self-directed engagement in play fostered independence for the children, while also providing valuable firsthand insight for the parents. The presence of parents during these activities is crucial in relation to expanding care, as it offers a unique insight into their child's emotions and social interactions, thereby deepening their understanding of their child's unique development.

Emily elaborated on the impact of the FAC on her relationship with Chandra, expressing how, as a parent, she rarely had the opportunity to witness how Chandra approached projects and creativity at school. However, Emily gained insight into Chandra's creative process, social, and problem-solving skills through their participation in the FAC (Figure 40).

Figure 40

Emily and Chandra Creating Their Clay Pieces Together



She explained:

As a parent, I didn't get to see how Chandra tackled a project at school. Right now, she was only four, but still knowing that she wanted to put every single color on one of the ornaments, for example, instead of just focused on a monochromatic look or just seeing how she approached those projects was fun. And also, she was like, I'm going to get it done quickly. Then I'm going to run around and have snacks, yeah.

This observation extended to how the FAC provided parents with a unique window into their children's interactions and dynamics outside the home by creating a space where they could observe their children engaging with peers, adults, and the artistic process in a different context.

In the following video, Chandra jumps right into the assemblage sculpture project, confidently looking for pieces and exploring on her own (Figure 41).

Figure 391

Chandra Searches for Pieces



Through moments such as this, parents could observe how their children approached challenges, took risks, and expressed their thoughts and emotions through art, often revealing aspects of their personality that may not be as visible at home. This deeper understanding and attunement are what strengthens relationships and consequently chains of care over time.

Being with your child and observing firsthand how they work and engage is very different than secondhand descriptions. For example, Sally reflected on the following noticing's of being with Etta in the FAC and learning more about her:

I mean, I think it was just for us, it was a good chance to practice being intentional and being in tune to what Etta was interested in doing. And for me, I think the painting one

was definitely, probably her favorite of all of them. And I think it was good for me to see how much she enjoyed doing that. As compared to the other mediums, which one she liked best.

Through firsthand experience, Sally could directly witness which mediums Etta enjoyed the most and how she interacted with the artmaking process. This is much different from hearing Etta's strengths and interests from someone else, as being there allowed Sally to see Etta's enthusiasm for and engrossment while painting. Sally's mentioning of being 'intentional and in tune' with Etta's interests speaks back to intentionality and how artmaking can reveal new ways of being together and nurturing relationships. At this time, intentionality allowed Sally to actively engage and observe Etta in a hands-on, real-world way. For example, in the following photo and video collage, Sally sits back and watches Etta paint. Etta is clearly engrossed in the making, focusing intently on her painting (Figure 42). This insight led Sally to learn more about her daughter and prompted her to sign Etta up for a painting class at another community arts center to encourage her creative growth.

Figure 42

Sally Is Attuned to Etta Painting



Sally's experience of painting with Etta was significant, leading to a new appreciation for her child's abilities. It was a new way of realizing and seeing who Etta was, separate from herself. She vividly remembered the moment she looked at Etta's painting and exclaimed, 'Honestly, I was looking at it, and I was like, this is so good'. This 'proud mom moment' of recognizing both Etta's interest and skill in painting underscores how artmaking can serve as a powerful lens for seeing a child's unique individuality. This moment of recognition is a prime example of Noddings (1984/2013) confirmation, as Sally's acknowledgment of Etta's abilities and interests affirms Etta's identity as a person separate from herself. Through the artmaking process, Sally witnessed Etta's potential in a new light, leading to an enhanced appreciation for who Etta is. In line with Noddings' theory, Sally's acknowledgment and support of Etta's

individuality and growth is a powerful act of confirmation. From Etta's expressions, it's clear she experiences moments of "glow," reflecting her joy in making art and the encouragement she receives from those around her. As a shyer child, you could see her personality and confidence shining through because of these FAC interactions. This example directly links to chains of care, as Sally's act of confirmation strengthens the chain by not only affirming Etta's capabilities in artmaking but also encouraging her emotional growth. From Etta's perspective, the combination of encouragement and recognition allowed her to flourish, as is evident by the 'glow' on her face in so many instances during the FAC.

Sally also reflected on how she observed Etta showing agency and autonomy in her painting, explaining, "Yeah, she just, she knew what she wanted to do. Nobody told her; she just looked at the picture and then went and did her own thing. And I also think it was almost like she got it painted so quickly she didn't want to be done, so she just kept going". In this context, artmaking revealed Etta's sense of confidence and independence in her creative decisions and allowed Sally to recognize and be attentive to this growing independence.

Approaches to pedagogy can be seen as finding new ways to demonstrate care. For example, Kay expressed her appreciation for the FAC's play-based approach, which encouraged children to express themselves creatively without strict guidelines. This approach allowed Chris (and the other children) to release energy without fear of reprimand, nurturing a supportive environment for both parents and children. Kay elaborated, saying:

I think that's really important, especially at that age when they don't have a lot of choices and everyone's kind of telling them what to do, to be able to have that creative expression. And also, when you get a little antsy, to be able to run around and nobody

say, hey, sit down, sit down, it's not time for that. That was a really nice village for both the parents and children.

Kay's description of the art club as a 'really nice village' highlights the value of creating an environment where care is expressed through flexibility and inclusivity. The FAC's play-based approach replaced more traditional expectations—like sitting still or adhering to rigid rules—with understanding, encouragement, and a focus on exploration. This environment allowed children to explore creative expression and self-discovery while parents found a space to connect with their children and others in a judgment-free, collaborative atmosphere. In this way, the FAC served as a metaphorical village, emphasizing new ways of collective care and shared growth.

Besides pedagogy, the FAC also allowed me, as the school's director, to show care in other ways for the artists, students, and families who attended. Snacks, drinks, smiles, listening, and dialogue—these were all part of how I modeled care in my interactions with the artists and participants. The FAC allowed me to demonstrate care in unique ways and on a different level.

Through being together in this space, I aimed to model Noddings' views on how schools and education can impact and be a force for social change by embracing care as a guiding pedagogy and the central force in how we interact with others and make decisions. Murray (2021) illuminates this idea, saying, 'What we treasure, and what feels quite rare and wonderful, is when we encounter a teacher who teaches in a way that shows they really know, love, and care for our child. What difference that kind of teaching makes for our whole family' (p. 43). In the same spirit, I worked to cultivate a creative and collaborative atmosphere that responded to all participants—both children and families—in a way that showed my desire to know, love, and care for the school community.

I hope my own children are surrounded by teachers and administrators who care—teachers who will listen to their ideas, help them find the water fountain when they are thirsty, and sit beside them to guide and support them. By being with the families in this creative and collaborative atmosphere, I showed care in new ways—through intentional pedagogy, actively listening, and learning about each person and family. Even small acts, like providing the 'very essential' snacks like popcorn, juice boxes, and sparkling water to participants and artists, became meaningful gestures of care.

Artmaking as Self-Care

While parents had the opportunity to learn new things about their children, they also learned new things about themselves, modeling growth and learning alongside their children. Sally reflected on her assemblage sculpture, saying, "That was great. I really enjoyed that one with (Lukas). I got really inspired and I thought, what? I loved what I made. I thought it was so cool" (Figure 43).

Figure 403

Sally's Assemblage Sculpture



The FAC provided a space for co-learning, where parents and children explored skills and ideas together. In this context, parents demonstrated how learning and growth are continuous processes, revealing new things, regardless of age. But it also became more than that, a space where parents were genuinely engaged in their artmaking and doing something enjoyable. For example, in the following extract, Kay reflected during the video-cued interview on the first FAC session, saying:

Watching it again, it reminded me. I remember coming home telling my husband that I don't feel like I'm a particularly good artist. But I really like art. And I remember thinking, this is really peaceful. And I do remember thinking just the painting and the strokes. I just really enjoyed it. And I enjoyed the time with Chris and doing something again that didn't seem like work, you know. Like so many things in motherhood, it can

feel kind of, I don't know, like you're trying too hard or it's too much effort, and so it's hard to enjoy it. But in that, I just remember feeling very relaxed and happy.

Kay's reflection highlights how the FAC space provided an opportunity to reflect on both herself (peace, joy, and enjoying artmaking) and as a mother (a reprieve). This space differed from how she felt as a caregiver in other situations. By creating an accessible and engaging environment, Kay, a mom of five, could have a reprieve from the work and stress of everyday parenting and do something she enjoyed while being present with her youngest son, Chris, age 5. The fact that the activity was enjoyable and playful allowed Kay to engage with Chris and the art making in a way that facilitated presence and attentiveness, leading to more genuine, responsive caregiving. Similarly, during the video-cued interview, Sally reflected, "Oh, I remember Carmen saying during (the painting session), thank you for the 'free therapy' to Ben. And I was like, oh, she is so right, this is so nice". Carmen's remark and Sally's agreement speak to the crucial role of self-care as the first link in the chain of care. This is not self-indulgent but is a necessary foundation for sustaining the capacity to care for others. All four interviewed parents acknowledged artmaking's therapeutic and restorative effects and how the FAC offered a space for this to occur. Practicing self-care is directly connected to Noddings' circles of care, as it highlights the foundational importance of caring for oneself to ensure sustainability. Taking time to care for oneself preserves one's capacity to extend care outwards to others.

Emily, a mom of three who attended FAC with her youngest daughter, Chandra, echoed similar thoughts during the video-cued interview when she highlighted the playful nature of the activities and how she felt they greatly enriched the overall experience. Emily recalled her favorite session, the assemblage sculpture, where the participants created assemblages from assorted wood scraps. She reflected on the rarity of adults having opportunities for such playful

engagement, contrasting it with the often-serious nature of art in adulthood. Despite feeling like she lacks traditional artistic talent, Emily found joy in the freedom to experiment and play with materials during the session:

My personal favorite was the last one, with Lukas. Just making something out of all of the scraps. That was my favorite because I think, I don't know, as an adult, we don't get to play with stuff like that. Right. And art is so serious when you're a grown up. I would never go to an art class right now. I don't have that kind of artistic talent. But being able to play with stuff, that was really fun" (Emily, 44:15)

Like Kay, Sally, and Carmen, artmaking in the FAC gave Emily a space to reflect on herself as an adult, offering both play and a much-needed reprieve. According to Wasserman (2023), "Play allows us the full gamut of emotions – joy, pleasure, pain, frustration, anger, exhilaration through play there is genuine, spontaneous laughter" (p. 20). For adults, play allows time to step outside the constraints of daily responsibilities, providing space to care for themselves. Playful artmaking serves as a medium for adults to reconnect with spontaneity and joy, as well as a way to connect with their children and those around them. In the following excerpt from the video-cued interview with Carmen, she shares how she remembers "laughing a lot" and how a feeling of community and report had settled in by the third FAC session for this group of participants (Figure 44).

Figure 414

"I Remember Laughing a Lot"



This was an unexpected finding, as I had not anticipated the FAC becoming a place for parents to find solace. However, this opportunity for self-care through playful artmaking underscores the importance of caring for oneself to better care for others—a key concept in Noddings' "chains of care." According to Noddings, care begins with oneself and flows outward to others. By engaging in self-care, participants can nurture themselves while also fostering emotional connection, collaboration, and mutual care with others. This dynamic nurtures children's development through emotional engagement and self-expression while allowing adults to model care and experience relational growth. The above reflection from Carmen is a perfect lead into the next session, which is about artmaking as an adhesive for community building and belonging.

Cultivating Belonging and Mutual Support

One of the most significant patterns I observed was the profound sense of belonging and mutual support that parents experienced in the FAC. They reported feeling less isolated and

appreciated the opportunity to share their stories and receive support from one another. The FAC served as a space where reciprocal care could flourish, not only between parents and children but also among the parents themselves. This sense of belonging and mutual support is crucial to Noddings' philosophy, as she emphasizes that caring is a dynamic, mutual process, a process of reciprocity. The interactions between the adults – listening, sharing, and providing support and encouragement- are living examples of this reciprocal care in action. After showing Kay the following video clip during her video-cued interview (Figure 45), she poignantly reflected on how this video clip captures this sense of belonging and mutual support:

I love how the parents are just sitting there, and it just reminds me of how, in America motherhood can be kind of isolated on an island where you're just kind of doing your own thing. But how neat that was to see. It reminds me of the women at the well gathering their water and their kids just running around playing. But they're like, building community, but also just letting the kids be kids.

Figure 425

“The Women at the Well”



This "women at the well" imagery conveys a sense of shared comradery, mutual support, and community that contrasts with the isolation many parents experience. In making art together, participants could connect differently, allowing new kinds of relationships to emerge. For instance, Kay and Emily reflected on the same moment in their video-cued interview. Kay remembered sharing a story about a challenging moment with one of her children and discussing the ups and downs of raising teenagers. After hearing the video clip, Kay responded:

I know that story well, because that's a story that I really like to encourage moms, and that's a story that I think it does resonate with a lot of moms that whether we're a new mom or a veteran mom or it's a baby or a teenager. It's all humbling, and we're all in this together. And every child is different. Once you think you've got something figured out, it can throw you for a loop.

This reflection highlights the value of being part of a community where you can openly communicate, and the people around you can understand and empathize with your experiences.

Emily, reflecting on the same moment, said, "I do remember talking with (Kay) and feeling like, okay. Because she was talking about her older teenager through the middle school stuff. I was like, oh, okay. Like, these little moments with parents, that's always so helpful". This shared experience of sharing challenges provided Emily with reassurance and support.

Carmen also reflected on the impact of the FAC on her sense of community, explaining:

The experience of FAC definitely strengthened the relationships that we had at the school. I definitely felt more, like, just comfortable talking with those moms specifically, at pickup or whatever event thing was maybe going on. It definitely contributed towards a feeling, like, a stronger sense of community, definitely at the school.

Carmen's reflection on the FAC underscores its role in fostering a sense of community. The experience of the FAC strengthened the relationships among the participants, making them more comfortable in their interactions at the school and other events. It significantly contributed to a stronger sense of community at the school. Her reflection highlights how the community formed in the FAC extended beyond the sessions, influencing the participants' daily interactions and sense of belonging.

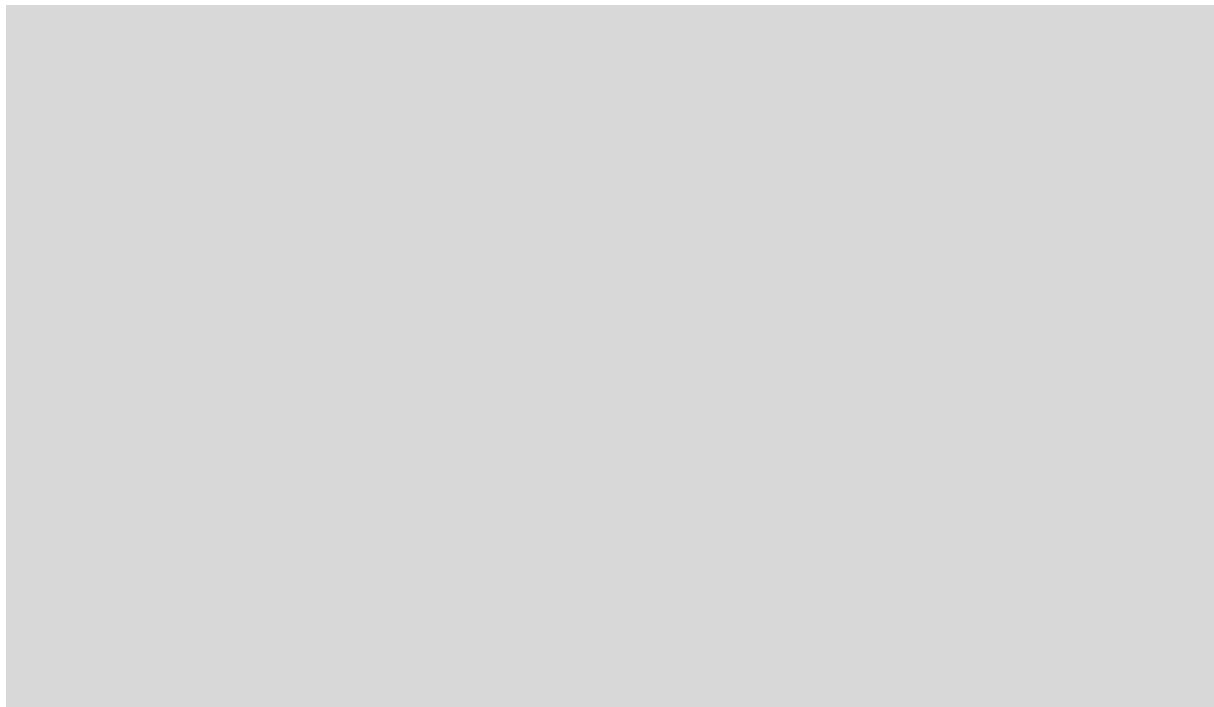
Expanding Circles and Chains of Care Beyond the Family Unit

The FAC not only fostered caring relationships between parents and children, as well as among parents but also expanded chains of care. Each caring relationship had the potential to influence and connect with others, forming a broader network of care. By providing a context where care was exchanged among parents, children, artists, and the school community, the FAC extended the circle of care to include families, local artists, and the wider community. This reflects Noddings' belief that care should not be confined but should expand outward, fostering an interconnected community where care is practiced and experienced in various ways.

The FAC, by bringing together diverse participants—parents, children, and artists, created opportunities for caring moments to occur beyond immediate units of family and friends. These interactions, between individuals who might not otherwise interact, reflect Noddings' view that care can manifest in everyday actions, contributing to a supportive and nurturing environment which expands the chain of care. Collaboration was widespread during the sessions. For example, when an artist showed a parent a new technique, a parent helped another child (other than their own) with a project, or a child helped a friend. This ties back to reciprocal care as discussed in *Finding One* but also speaks to how chains of care are expanded through practice. In one session, I observed Chandra caring for James, Oliver's little brother. James had wandered outside, and Chandra ran after him to ensure he stayed safe (Figure 46).

Figure 46

Chandra Ensuring James Safety



In another clip, I observed Chris asking Oliver if he could borrow his glue, and Oliver kindly obliged, sharing his materials. In another clip, I observed Etta helping Sally carry her wooden pieces back to the table. These gestures were opportunities for small acts of affirmation and responsiveness. Kay reflected on the importance of these seemingly small and essential forms of everyday care, explaining:

At the basic level, it's just loving them. And love can come in so many different ways.

And sometimes I think as moms, we have to remind ourselves that even spreading the peanut butter on the bread is an act of love. Because in the mundane, the daily mundane, we can kind of forget that we are doing something important, and we are caring for these children. (5:30)

Care is reciprocal and learned through relationships, reflecting that we care for others as we have been cared for; one's ability to extend care to others is influenced by the care they have received. Reciprocity is critical to Noddings'(1984) idea that care involves a two-way interaction where the caregiver and the cared-for are actively engaged, each with their own responsibilities; however, it is often not equal and asymmetrical, but this is okay. The FAC provided opportunities for these opportunities of care to emerge in small interactions. These interactions involved various participants, including parents supporting other children, an artist guiding participants through a new creative process, and participants offering encouragement and assistance to one another. Each participant, whether a parent, a child, or an artist, played a crucial role in creating a supportive and engaging environment. The following video (Figure 47) has multiple examples of collaborative reciprocity.

Figure 47

“This is the Treasure”



In this video, we can hear Hannah exclaim to Jessie, “Momma, I’ll carry yours and you carry mine” a wonderful example of reciprocal care. Later, we hear Lukas expressing his admiration for Eli’s assemblage, and Ed, Eli’s dad, echoing his sentiments, saying, “It’s great, buddy.... So cool... yep, he likes that space.” This specific feedback not only acknowledges Eli’s effort but also encourages him to continue exploring his creativity. In response, Eli proudly points to his artwork and explains, “This is the treasure.”

Lastly, in the following video clip (Figure 48), Lukas and Hannah discuss her assemblage sculpture.

Figure 43

Reciprocal Dialogue and Collaboration



This example of Hannah sharing her pieces, and Lukas accepting them and sharing how he plans to put them in his artwork, reflects the concept of reciprocity and autonomy. By collaborating in this way, Hannah and Lukas maintained their creative independence while also enriching the process through mutual support and responsiveness. It reflects how care can be expressed by respecting each other's autonomy while still being actively engaged in a reciprocal relationship, where giving and receiving are fluid and mutually beneficial. In Noddings' framework, this balance between autonomy and collaboration exemplifies how care is relational and responsive.

This leads to another significant pattern of the artist teachers' impact on the overall experience for parents and children. While all the participating artists were acknowledged for

their understanding of working with kids and providing the support they needed, many parents highlighted their favorable experiences with Lukas. Sally described him as "such a nice guy" and reflected on how "he was really good with the kids." During the video-cued interviews, Kay observed the following clip of Lukas interacting with the children and remarked, "They really are engaged there, aren't they?" (Figure 49).

Figure 49

Lukas Shares His Artwork



Sally agreed, adding, "Yes, you could tell he was very understanding of them and their process." From Emily's perspective, she described Lukas's session as "whimsical." She reflected on how "I think a lot about Lukas's (session) because it was so wiggly. It was so interactive and

tactile". Since the FAC sessions, I have reflected more fully on what made the sessions with Lukas so impactful. Speaking of the "interactive" nature that Emily remembered, this was no accident. Lukas intentionally placed the wooden pieces away from the tables to create a sense of excitement and interaction, describing it to participants as "like a treasure hunt." He carefully considered how the space was arranged to foster engagement and enthusiasm. Another example, as observed in the still shot of Figure 48, is how Lukas consistently got down on one knee to be at eye level with the children. He did this on multiple occasions, and this simple act conveyed a sense of intention and care, letting the children know he was genuinely engaged with them.

Another example of how the artist-teacher nurtured caring concepts is Ben's consistent engagement with participants in discussing their creative process and encouraging freedom of expression. For instance, Chandra incorporated various animals into her painting of cherry blossoms, while Chris experimented with paint mixing in his depiction of lips. This approach aligns with McClure, Tarr, Thompson, and Eckhoff's (2017) characteristics of a responsive educator who "understands and supports the unique ways that young children represent their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions through actual, virtual, and experimental media and processes" (p. 160). By supporting and valuing the individual ways children express themselves, Ben nurtured their creative confidence and contributed to the formation of chains of care—relationships built on mutual respect, attentiveness, and the shared experience of artmaking. This stress on the importance of a responsive educator promotes the environment of creative validation and recognition for participants' efforts.

The significance of small acts of care in enhancing the artmaking experience is essential because these gestures often serve as the foundation for deeper connections and emotional engagement within the learning environment. In art education, these small acts—whether a

moment of encouragement, a gesture of attentiveness, or genuine dialogue and listening—contribute to a broader chain of care beyond individual interactions. Recognizing and valuing these seemingly minor moments allows one to see how they accumulate, fostering a nurturing atmosphere where creativity, trust, and vulnerability can thrive.

Expanding these chains of care creates opportunities for participants to see one another in new ways, fostering a more profound sense of empathy and connection. For instance, as art educators model care and attentiveness, they invite students and families to reciprocate, creating a dynamic exchange of care that strengthens relational bonds. In this environment, participants may discover previously unseen strengths, insights, or emotional needs in themselves and others, leading to a richer, more meaningful shared experience.

Art educators play a pivotal role in this process by facilitating spaces where care is given and received, allowing all participants to feel seen, supported, and valued. By focusing on caring concepts within artmaking, educators help expand the circle of care, cultivating an interconnected community where the practice of caring is central to both creative expression and personal growth. This ripple effect of care underscores the profound impact art educators can have as they nurture individual development and the broader relational fabric of the community.

Finding Three - Art as a Tangible Artifact for Confirmations of Care

This finding shows how the artworks created during the FAC sessions served as tangible artifacts that preserved shared experiences and caring memories, offering participants a means for ongoing reflection and confirmation. The artwork created during the sessions became more than just creative outputs—they became symbols of the experiences and emotions shared during the sessions. As symbols of shared experiences, these tangible pieces served as a form of confirmation. Through the lens of Noddings' ethics of care, the completed artworks serve as a

form of *confirmation*, validating and showing value for the time spent together and the growth experienced by parents and children. In this context, art becomes a meaningful tool and touchstone for discussion, remembering, reflecting, and confirming the evolving nature of caring relationships and personal development. This embodies Noddings' ideas that genuine care is expressed through attentive, responsive, and reciprocal interactions (Noddings, 1984).

In the context of the FAC, the relational elements of confirmation were deeply intertwined in the artmaking process. The concept of confirmation in Noddings' theory, refers to validating each other's identity and contributions, vividly reflecting how families validated each other's artistic choices and contributions through their finished artworks. These tangible creations evoked memories and became symbols of identity, growth, and mutual recognition within families. This finding illustrates how care is continuous and can be preserved and revisited through physical representations.

For instance, during a video-cued interview, Sally highlighted how artmaking gave her daughter, Etta, the freedom to explore her creative path. Reflecting on the paintings they made together during session one, Sally remarked, "I really kind of tried to copy what Ben did, but Etta really took hers and made it her own." Although they started with similar themes, the final paintings demonstrated unique artistic approaches, such as when Etta decided to add her name and unique textures. Sally explained that Etta's work was so special that they decided to display it instead of tucking it back in the closet. This speaks directly to the tangible artwork and the choice to display the artwork is a direct confirmation. This reflection exemplifies how the artmaking experience confirmed Etta's individuality and sense of agency, while the choice to keep and display the painting affirms the caring relationship between mother and daughter, fostering a sense of connection and value.

Artworks as Memory Holders

The temporal aspect of care was also evident, with the artworks serving as enduring artifacts that allowed families to revisit and re-experience their caring interactions long after the FAC sessions. These physical artworks, such as the clay pinch pots and paintings, acted as memory holders, preserving the connections and shared moments of artmaking. Carmen fondly recalled how a heart-shaped ceramic piece (Figure 50) she created with Ingrid became a cherished memory, reflecting:

I just have a sweet memory of asking how she wanted to decorate it and us just kind of adding our own little things together. And it's in her room, it's still hanging up there. So, I love seeing it. I think about FAC a lot, actually, because I'm constantly having the physical reminder.

Figure 50

Clay Heart Made by Carmen and Ingrid



This reflection vividly demonstrates how the artworks took on lasting emotional significance, as well as confirming the power of artmaking in their lives. They represented more than just a creative project; they evoked positive memories of artmaking and were constant

reminders of their time together doing something they both enjoyed, deepening their bond and shared experiences. Another example is how, in a video-cued interview with Emily, she pointed to the bookshelf behind her and told me how “some of the pieces we made, the clay pieces, are back there... and then the others were hanging up on our Christmas tree, so we thought of you fondly.” This example from Emily highlights how artworks can serve as tangible memory holders and anchor positive emotions and connections to specific moments. For Emily, the clay pieces displayed on their bookshelf and hanging on their Christmas tree were reminders of shared experiences. They evoked fond memories of the artmaking process, and the relationships built through it.

Similarly, Sally noted how the clay pinch pots she and Etta made during FAC have evolved. The pinch pots found a new purpose as furniture in Etta and her younger sister's dollhouse. Sally remarked, “Sometimes I bring home art stuff, and I'm like what are we going to do with this? But I love it when pieces become utilitarian in other ways.” In the same context, Carmen shared how “I still have the little pinch pot that I made that sits by the sink in the kitchen. And we put, like, rings and stuff whenever we're washing dishes. The artwork serving as a functional object shows how art can remain integrated into the participants' lives, keeping the FAC alive in everyday moments and encapsulating and embodying love and care.

Reflecting on Caring Interactions

The artworks also played a significant role in sparking memories and deeper reflections on their time together. One example came from Emily, who explained how her family reconnected with their FAC experiences when they decorated their Christmas tree with the clay pieces they had made. Emily described how the ornaments served as a reminder of their time together, and she expressed gratitude, saying:

Thank you for the opportunity to do the FAC. It was a really special time and I will think of you and the FAC fondly every time we hang our tree, and we're putting the ornaments up. So, thank you for that really nice memory.

Similarly, Chris's artwork, a painting of lips, prompted a moment of reflection within his family when his father, Dan, rediscovered the piece. Chris's pride in his work was validated when Dan commented on how much he had always liked the painting. Kay explained "how it was just so neat that Chris was very proud that one stood out to his daddy." In the video (Figure 51), you can also hear Sally confirming Chris's work when she observes and praises how he "used all of the colors" and likes the way it turned out. These memories and confirmations are critical, especially in a child's early years, as Noddings explains how, "Memories of being cared for and reflections on such care constitute the early material of the ideal. Then, as the child learns to care for others, new memories are added to the developing ideal. (p. xvii).

Figure 51

Confirming Chris



This example illustrates how revisiting the artwork nurtured continued connection and confirmed Chris through recognizing his strengths and acknowledging what he made. This also relates back to the extension of chains of care, as these pieces were shared with other family members, extending the experience long after the FAC was finished.

I was excited to hear these reflections from Kay and Emily, as they resonate with my own experiences of making art with my children and are something I have continued to be curious about. For example, my children and I created place-based collages by visiting local spots in our community and collecting items from these places, like a napkin from our favorite restaurant and a leaf from a park we loved. We arranged the items on canvases, added other elements such as paint and sequins, and hung them on our walls, where they stayed for several years. Over time,

these artworks became a touchstone for meaningful reflections. My children would often reference the collages and share memories from the day we made them, talking about how much fun they had or recalling specific moments from those places. The collages captured a shared creative experience and became a way for us to revisit and deepen our connection to one another and our community. My experience and reflections from Kay and Emily illustrate how artworks can hold memories and provide ongoing opportunities to reflect on the caring experiences associated with them.

Confirming Identities and Growth

Creating and valuing these artworks also allowed families to see their and each other's development, contributing to the confirmation of identities in Noddings' terms. For Emily's family, artmaking extended beyond the FAC, prompting joint creative activities at home. Emily shared how, for her husband Jack's birthday, their older daughter led the family in a group art lesson, painting portraits of their pet, much like Jack and Chandra did in Ben's session (Figure 52).

Figure 52

Photo of Chandra's Siblings Hosting an "FAC" for Their Dad's Birthday



Emily noted how Jack and Chandra remarked on the similarities between their family art session and the FAC, saying, “This is kind of like FAC. We’re all doing this.” Moments like this illustrate how the artmaking process confirms both individual and familial identities while influencing ongoing creative practices within their home.

Emily’s example is also an example of confirmation, as it highlights how shared artmaking reinforces feelings of connection and recognition within the family. During the video-cued interview with Carmen, she shared how she displayed Ingrid’s artworks—not just from the FAC but from other artmaking activities—and how artmaking had become an integral part of their relationship and identity as mother and daughter.

Although I did not have the opportunity to conduct a video-cued interview with Ed, I observed how the creation of artworks, the value placed on them, and the intentionality of the process shaped his interactions with Ellis. I wish I could have explored whether these artworks continued to evoke feelings of confirmation for them over time

Impact of Video as Preserving Memory

Real-time moments as recorded in the videos revealed immediate opportunities for growth, learning, and bonding, and over time, memories reinforce and preserve these experiences, allowing for reflection and deeper appreciation. This is why I created highlight reels of FAC—so families could revisit these core experiences, keeping the emotional connections alive long after the moment has passed. After our video-cued interview, Emily shared the highlight video with her daughter, Chandra. Later that evening, she sent me a message sharing how Chandra loved watching the video filled with fun memories, especially the silly moments, although it made her cry by the end because she missed those friends and the special time they shared. The experience brought back a lot of love and fondness for that community. When asked about her favorite part, Chandra immediately mentioned Rapunzel on the screen. She also highlighted how much she enjoyed the painting and the memories. Emily ended the message with, “Thank you for today; I’m riding high on that trip down memory lane,” expressing gratitude for the opportunity to relive those memories through the video-cued interview and watching the video with Chandra (E. Collier, personal communication, February 13, 2024).

This passage from Emily and Chandra illustrates the emotional power of memories, even for young children, and how those memories shape their connections to past experiences and relationships. Chandra’s intense emotional response to the video (“by the end, she was crying”) demonstrates how deeply the memories of that time and community have been internalized. This suggests that memories can hold significant emotional weight even at a young age and influence a child’s sense of connection to past experiences. Emily’s note of “she is full of absolute love for that time and class” indicates that the memories are not just passive recollections but are actively cherished. This aligns with Noddings’ (1984/2013) view of caring relationships. These are

sustained through remembered interactions, which are instances where individuals recall past experiences that evoke positive emotions and reinforce the bond between people and experiences.

This passage also speaks to how video can serve as a bridge between the past and present, accessing memories that might have otherwise been filed away. According to Emily, the video triggered a “trip down memory lane,” allowing both Chandra and Emily to reflect and re-experience the joy and connection they felt during that time. Preserving the emotional content of past interactions and enabling individuals to revisit and relive those feelings aligns with how memory functions in caring relationships, reinforcing the bonds created and the building of the caring ideal. The idea that Chandra “loved the painting most, and the memories” suggests that the act of creating art was intertwined with the memories formed in that context. For children, these memories are critical in shaping their emerging identities and their understanding of what it means to feel connected, cared for, and part of a community. The connection between art, memory, and care highlights how creative experiences leave a lasting imprint on children’s emotional worlds.

Memories can also shape future actions and decisions, influencing how individuals approach similar situations in the future. For example, when Chandra and her sisters “recreated” FAC at home for their father’s birthday, in the form of a family painting session. Therefore, while the actual moments are essential for immediate impact, memories contribute to the long-term significance and appreciation of those experiences. Like Noddings, Dewey (1934/1984/2002), emphasizes the significance of experiential learning and integrating personal experiences into the educational process. Memory plays a crucial role in this integration, as individuals draw upon past experiences and knowledge to make sense of new information and

situations. Noddings' doesn't speak directly to memory as a cognitive process but does discuss the significance of memory formation as foundational to the caring ideal. Her emphasis on the relational aspects and integration of personal experiences suggests that memory plays a vital role within the broader framework and understanding of her ethics of care theory and philosophy.

Returning to the pinch pots with Sally, she elaborated on how they “stay with us” and how Etta uses them for chairs in her dollhouse because “they are the perfect size.” The phrase “they stay with us” suggests that these creations hold emotional value, serving as a vessel for memory and experiences. I love that Sally and Etta found joy in repurposing the pots and merging art and lived experience. Even though they are repurposed, the pieces carry the memory of the creative process, and the relationships involved in making them. This reflects how artistic creations can serve as memory holders and hold significance long after they are made. Whether they remain cherished objects or evolve into something new or for a different use, these works are infused with personal meaning.

This finding suggests that the artmaking process in the club did more than teach essential artistic skills; it also built a repository of positive memories associated with care. These memories contribute to an ongoing sense of emotional support, highlighting the role of art as a medium for expression and cultivating caring relationships that endure beyond the immediate context. The art pieces act as visual and tangible reminders of love, connection, and shared joy, transforming the act of making into something that transcends the moment and continues to nurture and confirm relationships over time, such as the clay heart that hangs in Ingrid's room, Chris's acrylic painting of lips, and Chandra and Emily's clay ornaments. In line with Noddings' (1984) concept of confirmation, the artmaking process affirmed the unique qualities and capabilities of both children and parents, allowing each individual to feel seen and valued.

Through this reciprocal recognition, the participants not only experienced care in the moment but also had their identities and relationships continually affirmed, deepening the bonds created through shared creative experiences.

In conclusion, the findings from this inquiry underscore the pivotal role of the FAC in fostering situated and adaptive forms of care. The artmaking process facilitated physical engagement, whole-hearted presence, and reciprocal relationships. By setting aside purposeful time for creative collaboration, parents and children could connect in significant ways, expressing care through words and shared actions, physical touch, the engrossing process of making together, and confirmation.

These findings significantly broaden our understanding of how care is embodied, situated, and relational, aligning with Noddings' (1984) care theory. They also introduce new insights into the potential of artmaking in fostering holistic growth and caring relationships. The unique opportunities for engrossment, attunement, and reciprocal care that resulted through artmaking highlight the profound impact of shared creative experiences on nurturing and deepening relationships, offering new ways to approach pedagogy.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS, REFLECTIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As we build an ethic of caring and as we examine education under its guidance, we shall see that the greatest obligation of educators, inside and outside formal schooling, is to nurture the ethical ideals of those with whom they come in contact. (Noddings, 1984, p. 49)

This quote from Noddings offers a robust foundation for understanding care's essential role in education, both in a school setting and everyday experiences and interactions. It emphasizes the profound responsibility caregivers (parents, teachers, etc.) possess to nurture the intellectual growth of young learners and their ethical and emotional development. Throughout my inquiry into artmaking and care within the FAC, this responsibility came to the forefront as I witnessed specifically how artmaking, as an engrossing, playful, and supportive activity between participants, became a medium for nurturing care and connection, clearly strengthening chains of care.

When daily interactions and experiences are approached from a place of care, we learn to constantly be on the lookout for ways to express, practice, and nurture it. It is at the forefront of our brains. However, it must be consistently practiced (Noddings, 1984; Robinson, 2011). Otherwise, it atrophies (Hamington, 2004). By nurturing the ideals of care through the artmaking process, educators and caregivers create environments where relationships are prioritized, care is practiced and strengthened, and individuals can learn the true essence of expressing themselves and connecting with others. This aligns wholly with Noddings' ethics of care, which insists that

the ultimate goal of education, both in and out of formal school settings, is to develop individuals who understand the value of caring relationships and who can extend those values outward into their communities. As this inquiry found, Artmaking, as a situated and adaptive form of care, is uniquely situated to nurture care not just as a concept but as a practice in real-time through creative collaboration, embodied engagement, deep engrossment, and reciprocal interactions. The role of artmaking in nurturing care and connection cannot be overstated, as it is a practical and effective way to implement care in all learning environments.

Revisiting the Research Question and Process

The purpose of this study was to understand more fully how caring relationships are nurtured among young learners and families through artmaking with local artists in an after-school FAC. The foundation of this inquiry originated from my experiences of wonder, emotion, and care while creating art with my children, especially when involving local artists. This experience motivated me to delve deeper into how nurturing relationships can be cultivated through artmaking together, and accessible art experiences can be facilitated for families and young learners led by local artists.

To achieve this, I established the FAC, a program hosted at a local Day School for children aged four and five and their families. I enlisted the expertise of three local artists to lead the FAC sessions, selecting them based on their experience working with children and their involvement in the community. I utilized video ethnography techniques to document the FAC sessions, using the video recordings as my primary field data. Additionally, I conducted four video-cued interviews with participating parents, which were transcribed.

I employed a multi-layered approach to analysis to answer my research question: How are caring relationships fostered among young learners and families through artmaking with local

artists in an after-school FAC? This approach included following Braun and Clarke's (2022) phases of reflective thematic analysis, which allowed me to explore care in conjunction with both the foundational concepts and the patterns of meaning in the dataset. The coding and thematic analysis helped me engage with and interpret how care was present in participants' experiences, leading me to the three main findings, which were discussed in depth in chapter five. In this final chapter, I will elaborate on conclusions and recommendations for art education based on the three main findings of this inquiry, which are:

1. Artmaking as a Medium for Engrossed and Situated Care
2. Circles and Chains of Care Strengthened Through Artmaking
3. Art as a Tangible Artifact for Confirmations of Care

To conclude my reflections on care, I would like to share some final thoughts that capture the journey of this inquiry and reflect more fully on my research findings. In doing so, I hope to leave the reader with a deeper understanding of how care, in all its complexities, can be nurtured and sustained through situated, care-oriented artmaking, and what this means for future research in the field.

My Thoughts on Care

This study underscores the profound role of artmaking as a unique tool for nurturing relationships. It is a powerful medium that fosters relational, emotional, and embodied connections among children, parents, families, and educators. The immersive nature of artmaking encourages active presence and engagement, which is particularly vital for forming attachment bonds, especially in early childhood.

While working on this conclusion chapter, I came across the following vignette I had written about the last FAC session and lost and/or forgotten about. I am so glad I did, as the

memory of this day- Lukas sharing his knowledge with the group, the children running back and forth collecting materials, and all of the participants engaging with the artmaking and each other- fills me with joy:

A Lost (and Found) Vignette

May 6, 2022: The One with the Spoons

There's something magical about spoons. Everybody loves spoons.

- Lukas

Today is the last day of the FAC. It is early May, and that feeling of summer approaching is in the air. Lukas Pulver is the visiting artist, and he arrives at the Common Room with his boxes of wooden pieces ready to be explored by the FAC. There are 13 people present today, including Lukas and me. The participants include Oliver, his mother, Mindy, and Oliver's little brother, James, who is around two years old. Next, we have Chandra and her mother, Emily and Etta and her mother, Sally. Virginia, Chris's grandmother, joins him for her first participation in the FAC. Finally, we have Lanie and her mother, Kim.

The FAC is in the big Common Room today, used by the school and the church. I have pushed three tables together towards the center of the room so that everyone can sit together.

Lukas has prepared an activity of building Louise Nevelson-style sculptures with scrap pieces of wood, gluing the pieces inside wooden boxes he has assembled for everyone.

Today, Lukas has a surprise in store for the FAC. With a mischievous glint in his eye, he announced, "So I have tons of wood for you, and I lucked out with you guys because my friend's boyfriend makes spoons." He drew out this last part, building anticipation. The room was filled with excited gasps from both kids and adults. Lukas continued, "And so I said to him about two weeks ago, I said, do you have any scrap spoon wood? And he said, oh I have

tons, he said, I burn it, I use it to heat my house. And I said, can I have a couple of boxes of it? And, so you might find. . .in the box. . . a spoon!" He held up a wooden spoon to show the group, and the room erupted with laughter and "oohs" from the participants . . .

Researcher note: Today, we experienced firsthand how the presence of a caring artist like Lukas can transform a simple activity into a profound experience. Lukas's active listening, empathy, responsiveness, and wholehearted engagement set the stage for the formation of meaningful relationships and memorable experiences within the FAC.

In response to finding this vignette, I was inspired to create one last photo and video collage from May 6 as a medium for final reflection (Figure 53).

Figure 44

Photo/Video Collage from May 6, 2022: The One with the Spoons



Note. I created this photo/video collage in the final stages of completing this dissertation, after finding this lost vignette. It serves as a fitting final reflection and farewell to the countless hours

that I spent with these photos and videos and through them, the participants. I feel a lot of gratitude for this experience as a researcher, educator, and caring community member.

The vignette and photo/video collage vividly illustrate that the playful engagement, collaborative creativity, and connection fostered through artmaking were precisely what I had envisioned for the Art Club (FAC). This aligns with Noddings' (1984) vision of engrossed, collaborative learning experiences that support and expand the practice of care. The playful engagement with materials nurtured joy and deepened engrossment in both the creative process and with each other. The opportunities for collaborative, interdependent artmaking fostered dialogue and collective problem-solving. Additionally, the shared experiences and memories created through artmaking, being together, strengthened emotional bonds. These outcomes are essential for nurturing the foundations of respectful, caring relationships and expanding the chain of care (Noddings, 1984; Robinson, 2011; Tredinnick-Kirby, 2022).

This vignette also powerfully illustrates how art educators, in this case, Lukas, as the artist/teacher, model care through practices like active listening, empathy, and wholehearted engagement. It highlights the impact of relational, care-oriented pedagogy, where the teacher's excitement, responsiveness to materials, and connection with participants nurture meaningful relationships and engaging, safe learning environments. This example reinforces how art educators are crucial in creating spaces where care and creative expression are naturally infused.

Through the artmaking process, I observed participants experiencing numerous opportunities for practicing care rooted in the specific context of each moment: the interaction with materials, the environment, and the relational dynamics all shaped these experiences. This is significant because artmaking can deepen existing relationships, like those between parents and children while nurturing new connections. A care-oriented pedagogy such as this is essential in

all learning environments where engagement, responsiveness, and engrossment are valued but carries especially meaningful implications for art classrooms, community-based art programs, and early childhood learning spaces.

Recommendations for Art Education

Bae-Dimitriadis (2024) asks the critical and timely question, "... how can art function as an embodiment that is full of possibilities that exist even beyond the classroom?" (p. 4). In response to this question, this inquiry shows that artmaking, when approached as a medium for engrossed and situated care, holds the power to go beyond formal instruction and rigid structures, offering space for possibilities of connection and reflection that extend far beyond the classroom setting and can have an impact long after the actual artmaking is finished. Rather than being ineffectual or even oppressive, the evidence is clear that artmaking is uniquely situated to creating caring interactions with materials, with the self, and with others. When participants engage with materials like clay, paint, and found objects, they engage with their emotional landscape and those around them, building new caring and empathetic relationships with potentially lasting effects.

As an actionable recommendation for art education, I believe what is of key importance right now is the criticality of training art educators in the ethics of care. As I shared in Chapter One, my introduction to Nodding's ethics of care and other care theories in education was a transformative moment during my graduate studies. In line with Bartee's (2020) findings, which show that teachers who value the emotional dimension of the arts draw students' attention to its nuances, art educators can emphasize art's unique role in expressing emotions and nurturing relationships through collaboration. Through this approach, artmaking becomes a vehicle for emotional and relational development, reinforcing care as an integral part of education. I am

hopeful about the potential of ethics of care to impact art educational learning and practice, and I believe it can inspire optimism in educators and students.

Noddings (1984) stressed the pivotal role of strong teacher-student relationships in education, a beneficial and essential concept for effective learning. When trained in care ethics, educators become more sensitive to their students' emotional and social needs, fostering an environment where students feel secure, valued, and understood. This foundation of trust and care is a catalyst for increased classroom engagement, motivation, and success, demonstrating the powerful benefits of care ethics in education. I like Bartee's (2020) use of the term care-oriented art education. Her research into creating life-long relationships with the arts examined how elementary performing and visual arts teachers intentionally integrated care into their teaching, using a care-oriented approach to make art classes personally relevant for students. Her study, which aligned with Dewey's (1938) views on holistic relationships, demonstrated how caring relationships, rooted in both affective content and pedagogy, can enrich students' experiences in art education.

When educators are grounded in the ethics of care, it nurtures the prioritizing of empathy and compassion in their daily interactions with students. This can make THE most significant difference in so many ways. Prioritizing empathy and compassion helps to nurture a climate in the learning environment where kindness, listening, and mutual respect are central. These values are critical for building relationships and creating a culture of care where students learn by example, have opportunities to practice care, and develop respect for themselves and others. In terms of practicing care, Noddings (2005) explains how "the practice provided must be with people who can demonstrate care" (p. 24), underscoring the essential aspect of educators

modeling caring practices and being attuned to reciprocal interactions. This holistic approach to building an environment centralized in care supports both academic and personal growth.

Preparing educators in the ethics of care is essential because it cultivates an educational environment that prioritizes relationships, holistic growth, and inclusive and responsive teaching practices. It also informs confirmation in the approach of what Tredinnick-Kirby (2022) describes as 'anti-childism,' explains how "Anti-childism and an ethics of care resist the notion of being quiet and just being seen, instead welcoming dialogue in creating a space where voices are heard, opinions are received, and transformation is made" (p. 151). This application of creating spaces for students' voices to be heard and taken seriously encourages their growth and development. This passage reflects Noddings' concept of confirmation through embracing an ethics of care that promotes dialogue, listening, and whole-hearted engagement, all hallmarks of Noddings' vision of care ethics. However, what specifically might some of these things look like in a curriculum of care? How might we think about future curriculum and pedagogy when we know, as this inquiry confirms, that artmaking can significantly strengthen chains of care?

Moving Towards a Care-Oriented Curriculum

When considering the implications for K-12 art education, we can purposefully reimagine curriculum and pedagogy to cultivate care through the creative process. An approach to art education that prioritizes the practice of care will not only enhance artistic skills but also nurture relationships, foster emotional growth, and build lasting communities rooted in care. However, as Lillard (2017) notes in her discussion of Montessori approaches, "Superficial insertions of research-supported methods do not penetrate the underlying models on which schools are based. Deeper change, implementing more realistic models of the child and the school, is necessary to improve schooling" (p. 15). While I will offer some actionable ways a care-oriented approach

could be implemented in the art classroom, I recognize that this is just a starting point for deeper, more meaningful change. As an experienced teacher, I also understand that even seemingly simple changes can be challenging, depending on each place and person's unique context and dynamics. Noddings (1984) explains how schools as institutions cannot care directly, "But a school can be deliberately designed to support caring and caring individuals, and this is what an ethic of caring suggests should be done" (p. 182). With this thinking, I hope the following thoughts on moving towards a care-oriented art curriculum will inspire readers to think about how artmaking and art education can be deliberately designed to support the practice of care and caring individuals.

First, art educators play a crucial role in modeling and teaching care through everyday interactions. By providing explicit instruction on how to care for materials, others, and the community, they can practically help students practice responsiveness and responsibility. For example, role-playing and modeling care can be integrated into the art curriculum through emphasizing respectful handling of art materials and guiding the students to view the classroom space as the 'third teacher,' a concept supported by Reggio Emilia and Montessori approaches as discussed in Chapter Three (Edwards et al., 2011; Lillard; 2017). In this way, the learning environment is seen as an active participant in education, promoting care and responsibility through the organization and use of materials. By intentionally guiding students to care for their space and resources, educators nurture a practice of respect and stewardship.

Second, art educators can promote confirmation and responsiveness by encouraging students to engage thoughtfully with their work and the work of their peers, offering guidance on providing respectful and productive feedback. Artmaking can be designed to highlight each student's individuality and contributions, using art as confirmation (Butler, 2010; Noddings,

1984). By creating opportunities where students celebrate their work and recognize the efforts of others, educators can nurture opportunities for dialogue and reciprocal feedback, Group exhibitions, reflective discussions, and peer feedback sessions allow students to feel seen, appreciated, and confirmed within their learning community, strengthening relationships and nurturing a caring classroom culture. However, it is very important for educators to be explicit about modeling the dialogue and clear with expectations in order to effectively practice this in the classroom. Encouraging students to view their work and the work of others through a lens of care—discussing how they can support and learn from one another—reinforces the practice of care in everyday classroom interactions.

Thirdly, art educators can make efforts to incorporate local artists and community engagement into the art curriculum, inspiring creativity through the local landscape and strengthening connections between students and their communities (Lawton et al., 2019). Showcasing the work of diverse local artists in the classroom and facilitating collaborative projects between students and artists, when possible, can help students appreciate and engage with the broader creative culture around them. These interactions create new chains of care as students learn to value the contributions of artists from different backgrounds and generations. By involving local artists, art educators can model how artmaking fosters a more interconnected and caring community, bridging gaps across various experiences and perspectives.

Fourthly, art educators can encourage student voice, choice, and agency by allowing students to select materials, themes, or projects that resonate with them personally. Tredinnick-Kirby (2022) posits, “Noddings’ ethics of care is an ethics of resistance to the typical hierarchical classroom structures, prescribed learning models, and restrictions on children’s learning time and agency” (p.171). When students have choices in the materials, themes, or projects they work on,

they are more likely to feel personally connected and invested in the creative process. This investment in the process nurtures engrossment as students deeply engage with topics that matter to them. As this research demonstrated, engrossment in artmaking can extend to the people around them, cultivating a creative and safe environment where care is actively practiced and experienced.

Lastly, encourage dialogue around the artwork sent home. Many parents and caregivers may need to learn how to discuss their child's artwork or what questions to ask to engage in meaningful conversations. To keep the memory of these pieces alive, art educators could encourage caregivers to display the artwork if possible and intentionally provide caregivers with prompts or questions to ask their children, such as, 'What inspired you to create this?'. Art educators can also encourage students to practice sharing one thing with their caregivers about what they made, such as their favorite part of making the work or a challenge they overcame. This intentional approach can help nurture dialogue and preserve the artwork as a meaningful artifact of memory and connections made.

Reflections on Video Research Methods

Reflecting on the strengths and challenges of using video methods in my research is essential. Video documentation significantly enriched my understanding of care and connection, offering insights that would not have been possible otherwise. However, it required rigorous engagement and constant adjustment, especially as I was the sole researcher. While video methods allowed me to be fully present during the sessions, balancing the technical aspects with participant observation was challenging. I believe that having multiple researchers would have made the process smoother (admittedly, something Dr. Tobin warned about; personal correspondence, 2018), though the benefits ultimately outweighed the difficulties. This

experience has also opened up exciting possibilities for the future use of video methods in research.

One of my initial goals in using video was to allow myself to be more present as a participant/researcher. Relying on the iPads to record freed me from the task of constant note-taking or direct observation. However, reviewing the footage, especially in the first few FAC sessions, I found that certain close-up moments were not as thoroughly documented as I would have liked. While I did take additional photos and videos occasionally, in hindsight, I would have used additional devices, such as another iPad or my iPhone, to take more detailed photos or zoom in on specific moments that could have further enriched the data. Speaking of data, another complexity was how the sheer volume of data generated by video recordings was initially overwhelming. Reviewing, coding, and analyzing hours of footage is time-consuming and requires a focused, organized approach that I had to figure out and refine by immersing myself and wading through it. I am hopeful that by sharing the details of the process in Chapter Four, I can help clarify the process for future researchers interested in using these techniques.

One of the most practical challenges was deciding where to position the iPads to capture as much action as possible. Given the dynamic and interactive nature of the artmaking sessions, covering a wide field of view was essential. However, placing the devices further away to encompass more of the environment resulted in a trade-off: while the broader interactions were recorded, the audio quality—especially for capturing detailed conversations—was often unclear. This created difficulties during rewatching, as you could not always fully hear or interpret meaningful verbal exchanges. Another challenge was balancing the desire for the videos to be non-intrusive with the need to capture detailed moments. I wanted the participants, especially children, to feel as natural and uninhibited as possible without recording devices influencing or

changing their behavior. However, this meant there were moments where the level of detail, especially in facial expressions or subtle interactions, was lost due to the distance or positioning of the cameras. I would advise future researchers wanting to employ video methods to think through the process before beginning and consider what it is you are hoping to capture and understand, as it will affect how you make decisions such as close-up vs. wide-range shots, length of videos, and participant interactions with the devices and within the space. This push and pull between minimizing the impact of the cameras while trying to capture the critical dynamics of the experience added a layer of complexity to utilizing video methodology.

Despite the learning curve and challenges of using video, the benefits outweighed the challenges. Videotaping allowed me to capture the rich dynamics of the artmaking sessions in real-time, preserving the physical interactions, facial expressions, body language, and emotional responses of both children and adults. This provided an immensely more comprehensive understanding of how care and connection were expressed, offering depth that written notes or interviews alone might have yet to capture. By revisiting the footage, I could reflect deeply on the moments of engagement, engrossment, and other examples of care that may have been missed or forgotten in the moment. This reflexive opportunity added layers of analysis, helping to identify patterns and subtle shifts in the relationships that could only be observed through being able to revisit the footage as many times as needed. I am surprised that video methods are not more widely used, something that other scholars in the field have also expressed (Goldman, 2007; Pink, 2007; Tobin, 2019) with Tobin (2019) stating how "these methods have not been employed as often as they could or should be" (p. 265). Video methods are especially conducive to research in art education because they capture the nuances of the creative process, including

non-verbal communication, gestures, and interactions that are vital in understanding how connection and learning unfold during artmaking.

Another crucial aspect of capturing the FAC sessions was the video-cued interviews. The video segments allowed participants to revisit their experiences and reflect on their time in the FAC sessions during the video-cued interviews. It was invaluable that the participants could watch the footage and provide insights into their thoughts or feelings in specific moments. Tobin (2019) explains how the (video-cued) "method, at its best, shifts the anthropological gaze from the researcher observing and interpreting information to informants observing and explaining themselves" (p. 267). The video-cued interviews allowed for detailed reflection and analysis of the participants' dynamic, creative, and caring moments. Their voices enhanced the relational and experiential understandings, adding authenticity and depth to the findings that could only occur from listening to the participants' perspectives, a practice that should always be a priority in quality research.

Aside from the methodology and analysis motivation for using video methods, another benefit of documenting the experiences was sharing this footage with the adults and children who participated. I created the highlight videos to share with them from the perspective of a mother preserving a memory. Although I did not discuss the Pilot Study in this inquiry, I completed a pilot study using video methods with my children before starting my research study. This pilot study resulted from being a student in Dr. Joseph Tobin's video ethnography class, a pioneer in video-cued multivocal ethnographic methods. One unexpected outcome of the pilot study was how much my children enjoyed watching the video footage repeatedly. Even many years later, they still enjoy revisiting our creative experiences in the pilot study through watching the videos. As a parent, as more and more time goes by, the videos become even more valuable.

I hope this detailed account encourages other researchers to utilize video methods. Video offers the indispensable ability to capture the richness of real-time interactions, emotions, and subtle gestures or moments that other methods might miss. Using video methods to record and revisit experiences and utilizing video-cued interviews to illuminate participants' reflections allows for a deeper analysis of relational dynamics and provides an invaluable resource for revisiting critical moments during the creative and dynamic processes in art education.

Future Research and Final Reflections

As this research inquiry comes to a close, I realize that I am just seeing the tip of the iceberg regarding the possibilities of future artmaking and care ethics research. The rich findings from this study point toward numerous potential avenues to explore further. Artmaking has proven to be a powerful medium for nurturing care, fostering connections, and creating tangible artifacts of relationships, but there is much more to discover. Based on the conclusions and reflections on these findings, the following recommendations for future research should be considered.

First, I am very curious to explore how care-oriented approaches in art education, which prioritize the emotional and relational aspects of learning, impact students' long-term relational and emotional development. Care-oriented art education has shown immense potential for fostering immediate bonds of attachment and relational growth (Bartee, 2020). However, more is needed to know about the long-term effects of these approaches on students' emotional and relational development as they move through different stages of education. Future research could track students over an extended period to explore how early experiences in care-focused art programs influence their ability to form and sustain caring relationships. This could include

investigating how these programs shape emotional intelligence, empathy, and social connectedness as students grow into adulthood.

Second, future research would greatly benefit from expanding the scope of this inquiry to foregrounding the voices and reflections of the children. The video-cued interviews were primarily about the parents' experiences and reflections on this inquiry and while the video footage from the FAC gave invaluable insight and windows into the children's experiences, this study would have significantly benefited by including their reflections and opinions. Including the children's voices and perspectives in future research would offer a more holistic understanding of how care and connection are experienced across generations. Children's reflections on artmaking can provide valuable insights into how they perceive care, attachment, and evolving relationships with their caregivers.

Another aspect of this research that needs to be expanded upon would be to include the reflections and insights from the artists' perspectives on the experience. Initially, this was a very important aspect of my research, as I had wanted to explore the benefits of triangulation when artists, families, and children form relationships. Understanding how local artists perceive their role in fostering care, community, and creative growth in a shared artmaking environment could offer valuable depth to the field of community-based art education and future programs. Their reflections on reciprocal learning, the dynamics of engaging with children and families, and their contributions to nurturing care through artmaking would enrich the understanding of how these programs operate as collaborative spaces for growth and connection. This addition could provide a more holistic view of the impact of artmaking on care from multiple angles, further strengthening the interconnected network of relationships fostered in such settings.

Related to my recommendation that art educators be prepared in the ethics of care, future research examining the role of educators in extending circles and chains of care would be highly beneficial. Research could further explore how educators model care, create spaces for mutual support, and extend these connections beyond the classroom into families and communities, sustaining long-lasting, community-wide care. Perhaps this might mean working more closely with community partners and developing intergenerational programming. This inquiry would provide valuable insights into how educators nurture the ripple effect for relational and emotional growth within and outside school environments.

Finally, I am extremely curious about investigating the long-term impact of art as a tangible confirmation of care. The art produced in shared artmaking experiences is a lasting confirmation of care, encapsulating the relational and emotional investments made during its creation. This finding from my inquiry has piqued my interest in how caregivers can intentionally nurture reflection and confirmation with their children through tangible art artifacts over time. How would memories of the experience change over time? How would families or individuals engage with these pieces over time? Do they serve as ongoing reminders of shared experiences, emotional bonds, or moments of deep care? Long-term studies could examine how tangible artworks are revisited and how they continue to reinforce memories, evoke reflection, and nurture emotional connections.

At the heart of this research inquiry is my desire to understand more about how human connections and caring relationships can be sustained through artmaking and flourish and grow. While some of the initial intentions of my inquiry fell into the periphery, what the data helped me to observe and learn is still very exciting and adds beneficial insight into ways to approach care-orientated artmaking. As an educator and mother, I hope this dissertation conveys my

sincere hope and encouragement for the growth of care-oriented approaches in art education. Ultimately, through integrating artmaking and care ethics and approaching artmaking experiences through Noddings' lens of care, we can create spaces where relationships flourish, nurturing people of all ages in significant and lasting ways. This comprehensive approach, integrating collaboration, family involvement, and reflective artmaking, demonstrates how art education can expand and strengthen the caring ideal, both within the classroom and in the broader community. This underscores the vast potential for care in various contexts, offering hope and encouragement for care-oriented pedagogy's future in art education and early childhood spaces.

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APPENDIX A

Participant Recruitment and Consent Letter

Approved by University of Georgia
Institutional Review Board
Project ID PROJECT00005364
Approved on: 4/25/2022

**UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
CONSENT LETTER**

FRIDAY ART PARTY: DEVELOPING COMMUNITIES OF CARE THROUGH ART

Dear 5-day four parents,

As you may know, I am a PhD candidate in the Art Education Department at the University of Georgia under the supervision of Dr. Lynn Sanders-Bustle. I am inviting you to take part in a research study with your child and three to four local artists from the Athens community.

The purpose of this research is to understand how art experiences between young learners and adults facilitate instances of care, as well as more fully understand the value of implementing a cross generational art club in an early childhood setting. The research questions being explored are:

- How do art experiences between young learners and adults facilitate instances of care?
- What relationships emerge when young learners and families have opportunities to connect with artists and artmaking local to where they live?
- What do video methods offer in terms of documenting, preserving, and revisiting artistic experiences and locating instances of care?

I am inviting the students and parents in the 5 day 4's class to participate! If you agree to take part in this study, as participants, each student and parent will meet at [REDACTED] for four Friday's after school from 12:45-2:15. To keep numbers lower, we will be offering a choice of two sessions: April 22 – May 13 OR May 20 – June 10. Students and parents will meet with a local artist each week for art making, dialogue, and fun together! The art club will be free of charge. Each meeting will be recorded on video for research purposes, but no video or images will be shared with the public without consent. The photos and videos will be kept for training purposes or presentation. Participation is voluntary, and you can stop attending art club at any time. The decision to participate or not to participate will not affect any other facets of attending Emmanuel Day School. I do not foresee any risk or discomfort associated with participating, but please reach out at any time with questions or concerns.

The information collected during this study may be shared with other researchers or used for future studies. Steps will be taken to protect you and your child's privacy by replacing you and your child's name with a pseudonym. The list that links the pseudonym to you and your child's name will be kept in a separate place. I may publish articles and present the research at conferences but will not publicly identify you or your child. I do not plan to share identifiable information with anyone who is not connected to

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this research study. If you have any questions about the study, please contact me at amberwpitt@uga.edu or 706-207-1908. If you have any complaints or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at IRB@uga.edu or 706-542-3199.

Your participation in this study will help us further understand the importance of artmaking, together, and how artmaking can serve as a vehicle in creating communities of care. Your participation and feedback will also help with planning future art clubs with parents, students, and community artists. The art materials used will stay at the school or with the artist, but you and your child will be able to take home the finished art work you create. Please return this form by Wednesday, April 20th if you would like to participate.

Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,
Amber Pitt

If you agree to allow yourself and your child to participate in this research study, please sign below. Also, please indicate which session you would like to participate in by ranking your order of preference (1st, 2nd).

_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Name of Child		
_____	_____	_____
Name of Parent/Guardian	Signature	Date

_____ **Session One** - April 22 – May 13

_____ **Session Two** - May 20 – June 10

Please keep one copy and return the signed copy to the researcher.

APPENDIX B

Artist Recruitment and Consent Letter

Approved by University of Georgia
Institutional Review Board
Project ID PROJECT00005364
Approved on: 4/25/2022

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA CONSENT LETTER

FRIDAY ART PARTY: DEVELOPING COMMUNITIES OF CARE THROUGH ART

Dear _____,

As a PhD candidate in the Art Education Department at the University of Georgia under the supervision of Dr. Lynn Sanders-Bustle, I am inviting you to take part in a research study as a local Athens artist interacting with children ages 4 - 5, and their caregivers.

The purpose of this research is to understand how art experiences between young learners and adults facilitate instances of care, as well as more fully understand the value of implementing a multigenerational art club in an early childhood setting. The research questions being explored are:

- How do art experiences between young learners and adults facilitate instances of care?
- What relationships emerge when young learners and families have opportunities to connect with artists and artmaking local to where they live?
- What do video methods offer in terms of documenting, preserving, and revisiting artistic experiences and locating instances of care?

I am inviting you, as an artist in the Athens community, to participate in facilitating this art club with two different groups of young learners and parents. If you agree to take part in this study, as a participant, you would meet at _____ for one to two Friday's after school from 12:45-2:15 between the dates of April 22 – May 13 and for one to two Friday's between the dates of May 20- June 10. (The dates will be determined according to what fits best with each artist's schedule) To keep numbers lower, we will be offering a choice of two sessions for the young learners and caregivers: April 22- May 13 OR May 20- June 10. Students and parents will meet with you, the artist, each week for art making, dialogue, and fun together! The art club will be free of charge for the parents, but each artist will be paid \$100 for each 1.5 hour session and materials will be provided as needed. I would like for each artist to share their work with the group, and lead the group in making art, together. As the researcher, I am available to talk over ideas and/or to help during the art club activities. Each meeting will be recorded on video for research purposes, but no video or images will be shared with

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the public without consent. The photos and videos will be kept for training purposes or presentation. I do not foresee any risk or discomfort associated with participating, but please reach out at any time with questions or concerns.

The information collected during this study may be shared with other researchers or used for future studies. Steps will be taken to protect your privacy by replacing your name with a pseudonym, if you so choose. If you choose to use a pseudonym, the list that links the pseudonym to you will be kept in a separate place. I may publish articles and present the research at conferences but will not publicly identify you without consent. If you have any questions about the study, please contact me at amberwpitt@uga.edu or 706-207-1908. If you have any complaints or questions about your rights as a research volunteer, contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at IRB@uga.edu or 706-542-3199.

Your participation in this study will help us further understand the importance of artmaking, together, and how artmaking can serve as a vehicle in creating communities of care. Your participation and feedback will also help with planning future art clubs with parents, students, and community artists. Please return this form by Friday, February 18th if you agree to participate.

Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,
Amber Pitt

_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please keep one copy and return the signed copy to the researcher.

APPENDIX C

Email Video-Cued Interview Request

Hi!

How are you? How is your family?

I hope everything is going well with you guys and your 2024 is off to a wonderful start.

I've definitely missed seeing you and (your daughter) over the past year. I hope all of your kiddos are having a great school year :)

I am writing to see if you might be able to spare some time for an interview regarding the FAC you and (your daughter) participated in for my study. I am (finally!) finishing my dissertation and would really love to hear your perspective and thoughts on your experiences.

The interview would be via Zoom and would likely take approximately 30 minutes. It will involve you watching a few video clips from the FAC and answering questions about your experience/reflections. I am very flexible and can accommodate your schedule; just let me know. However, please know that I completely understand if your time does not allow for this, and there are no worries at all!

If you are available for an interview, please let me know your preferred date/time. I'm free as early as tomorrow and available any day, but I am flexible and can accommodate whatever would be best for you. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you so much for considering my request! Please tell everyone in your family hello from me, and hugs to (your daughter) :)

Warmly,

Amber

APPENDIX D

Semi-Structured Interview Script

Video-cued interview questions:

If you want to explain anything or have questions, please tell me to stop the video.

- 1) How would you describe your overall experience of making art together with your child and local artists?
- 2) Did the videos evoke any memories which had been forgotten?
- 3) Did any meaningful connections occur as a result of the FAC sessions?
- 4) How would you define caring?
- 5) Are there any specific memories you have from FAC?
- 6) Can you tell me a little bit more about what was happening in this video?
- 7) Can you share any thoughts or emotions that arose while viewing the video?
- 8) What aspects of the video stood out to you the most? Why?
- 9) Did the video bring attention to anything you weren't aware of?
- 10) Is there anything else you would like to add or clarify about your thoughts on the video?
- 11) Do you feel like these FAC experiences allowed you to actively engage, listen, or be attentive in specific ways with either your child, the artists, or other participants?
- 12) Was one of the FACs particularly enjoyable? Can you articulate why?
- 13) How do you think FAC would with your child now at their current age?
- 14) What suggestions might you have for improving or expanding upon this type of FAC experience?

APPENDIX E

External Site Authorization to Conduct Research

[REDACTED] Episcopal Day School
[REDACTED]

EXTERNAL SITE AUTHORIZATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Date: 4/19/22

Dear Institutional Review Board:

The purpose of this letter is to inform you that I give *Amber Pitt* permission to conduct the research study titled *Friday Art Party*. We have agreed to the following study procedures: The researcher will meet with community artists, caregivers, and young learners once a week for an art club, where the local artists share their work and invite the young learners and caregivers to make art together based on their style of art. The data the researcher will be collecting includes transcripts of interviews with artists and ongoing video footage from participants during artmaking. Secondary data will include researcher field notes from observing the art-making sessions. Artwork created by participants may serve as supporting data and evidence, but will not be the main focus of data collection as the focus of this research study is to understand experiences that occur through art-making.

This also serves as assurance that this institution complies with all State and Federal laws regarding Human Subject Research and will ensure that these requirements are followed in the conduct of this research.

Sincerely,

Robert Salamone

Robert Salamone, Rector

rector@[REDACTED]

APPENDIX F

IRB Approval Letter



UNIVERSITY OF
GEORGIA

Tucker Hall, Room 212
310 E. Campus Rd.
Athens, Georgia 30602
TEL 706-542-3199 | FAX 706-542-5638
IRB@uga.edu
<http://research.uga.edu/hso/irb/>

Human Research Protection Program

APPROVAL

April 25, 2022

Dear [Thelma Sanders Bustle](#):

On 4/25/2022, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Title of Study:	Friday Art Party: Developing Communities of Care through Art
Investigator:	Thelma Sanders Bustle
Co-Investigator:	Amber Pitt
IRB ID:	PROJECT00005364
Funding:	None
Review Category:	Expedited 6, 7

Materials reviewed: IRB Protocol Application, [Friday Art Party consent letter, updated 4_15.docx\(0.01\)](#), [Consent Letter for Athens Artists, Updated 4_15.docx\(0.01\)](#), [Friday Art Party Recruitment Phone Script.docx\(0.01\)](#), [VE Interview Questions for EEDS Art Party.pdf\(0.01\)](#), External Site Authorization Letter

This study meets the criteria for permissible research with children as set forth at 45 CFR 46.404. Adequate provisions are made for soliciting the permission of parents or guardians per 45 CFR 46.408(b) and 45 CFR 46.116. Permission of one parent or guardian is sufficient under 45 CFR 46.408(b).

This project is eligible for Expedited review per University of Georgia policy. The IRB approved the protocol beginning 4/25/2022. A progress report will be requested prior to 4/25/2025. Before or within 30 days of the progress report due date, please submit a progress report or study closure request. Submit a progress report by navigating to the active study and selecting Progress Report. The study may be closed by selecting Create Version and choosing Close Study as the submission purpose.