

Students' Engagement and Parents' Involvement in Extracurricular Activities

by

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Abstract

In recent times, students' school experiences are not limited to traditional classes and hanging out with friends; an increasing number of students are encouraged to participate in various extracurricular activities by teachers and parents. These activities are believed to aid in the application of skills and character building, and thus to promote personal development. This project reviews students' engagement rates in three main extracurricular activities: sports, the arts, and academic clubs. The findings reveal that students' individual development and experiences vary in different activities. Moreover, parental involvement also plays an important role in influencing students' participation and development. Parental support enables students to access more activities, however, their performance can be restricted by parental pressure as well. Therefore, it is of great importance for parents to understand their roles in their children's extracurricular activities.

Keywords: development, extracurricular activities, parental involvement, participation

Introduction

This project pertains to students, parents, and extracurricular activities. I will illustrate the importance and the meaning of the topic in the background and personal interest sections, whereas the definition section will denote key terms surrounding the topic. In the conclusion, I will present opinions and thoughts on the findings.

Background

Extracurricular activities play an integral role in developing the diversity and flexibility of curriculum in education worldwide. Many students tend to explore the world by manipulating their surroundings rather than only immersing themselves in textbooks. Extracurricular activities are now becoming important components of students' secondary school years and provide them with enjoyment (Lipscomb, 2007). Thus, the majority of Western students are provided with opportunities to engage in extracurricular activities during most of their school time. In China, students' access to extracurricular activities has been given greater priority as of late. An increasing number of special interest classes have been offered outside of school hours and financial investment in maintenance of facilities (e.g., activity rooms) has been approved by school administrations. Extracurricular activities are believed to benefit students by allowing them to "express and explore their identity" (Feldman & Matjasko, 2005, p. 161), develop practical abilities and skills, and "establish relationships with other students and teachers" (Stearns & Glennie, 2010, p. 307). In addition, extracurricular activities also enable teachers to better understand their students by comparing their performance in

recreational activities with their performance in formal courses. Schools are allowed to organize courses and activities with students' needs in mind and consider what type of extracurricular activities are attractive to students when making improvements (Himelfarb, Lac, & Baharav, 2014; Stearns & Glennie, 2010). Therefore, many studies have been conducted surrounding this topic, and one of the major focuses was on the relationship between students' participation and consequent outcomes. As extracurricular activities have been widely accepted as a means for students to learn specific skills and to apply their book-knowledge in the real world, it is important for researchers who study extracurricular activities to take into account the influence of students' development through these activities.

Personal Interest

My personal interest in extracurricular activities goes back to one course I took at the University of Victoria, Educational Theory in Practice: Canadian School Context. In this course, we observed classes at three Victoria-area schools: McKenzie Elementary, Central Middle School, and Victoria High School, all of which have long histories and good reputations. This was the first access I'd had to Western-style schooling. At Central Middle School, the Vice-Principal gave us a detailed presentation about special enrichment activities for each student in the school to engage in and explore their interests. Students in this school are allowed to take various exploratory classes such as cooking, dancing, music, and even playing board games without worrying about academic pressure. The purpose of these enrichment classes is to give students an idea of

what they would like to learn on their own. Thus, they are more likely to become active participants in their learning rather than passive recipients of information. For example, students taking the enrichment course entitled “Fishy Fishy” were asked to take care of an aquarium on their own under the guidance of their teacher. They needed to maintain the temperature of the water, make sure the baby fish had enough food, and keep the aquarium clean so the fish could lead a comfortable life. That visit led me to research enrichment programs. After searching online, I discovered that enrichment programs are not confined to British Columbia.

In Ontario and Quebec, and in other North American provinces and states, the same kinds of courses are offered (Denault & Poulin, 2016; Guèvremont, Findlay, & Kohen, 2014). Although these courses are related to enrichment and are not extracurricular activities per se, the similarities between the two, such as curriculum provision and content, further developed my interest in extracurricular activities. I was inspired to rethink Chinese students’ extracurricular activities and their attitudes towards them.

For example, when I was in Grade one, there were no extracurricular activities offered at my elementary school. I was therefore forced by my mother to learn to play the Erhu at an off-campus music institution. Erhu is a conventional Chinese instrument and fairly challenging for children at young age to learn as it only has two strings. Learning to play the Erhu was a nightmare for me and I spent most of my after-school time practicing an instrument I had no interest in. I rebelled against my mother, skipped classes to prove I would never become interested in Erhu, and finally won the battle. Both my mother and I went through a hard time after we decided to drop the Erhu class. She was disappointed that her daughter was unable to understand her parents’ intentions. Besides Erhu, I took

many other interest classes such as traditional Chinese painting, Latin dance, and Guzheng—another traditional folk musical instrument. However, other than Guzheng, which I chose to learn out of my personal interest, I was forced to participate in the other activities by my mother. I gave all of them up except Guzheng after I entered middle school.

On the one hand, many interest classes are normally developed by off-campus educational institutions in China and most of these classes claim to mark students' achievements via certificates, etc. Among the providers of these interest classes, community youth centres are more official as they are funded by national and local governments, thus being responsible for providing students with opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities (Sek-yum Ngai & Lu, 2010). Moreover, according to recent studies on extracurricular activities in Chinese society, findings indicate that students' personality, self-concept, and other developmental skills are now becoming important factors in this field (Shiah, Huang, Chang, Chang, & Yeh, 2013; Zhang & Postiglione, 2001). On the other hand, as students, we saw these activities as being unimportant and sometimes skipped classes as they were not offered by the school and our parents took our school records more seriously. Therefore, my observation of extracurricular activities in North American schools encouraged me to perform this study in order to provide some revelations regarding these interest classes in Chinese society.

Definition of Extracurricular Activities

Although extracurricular activities have long been seen as an important part of North American students' school life, these activities are not considered to be a part of the formal curriculum. Extracurricular activities may be defined as “developmental activities performed by students that fall outside of the normal school curriculum and are practiced outside of regular class hours” (Forneris, Camiré, & Williamson, 2015, p. 48). They clearly separate extracurricular activities from official academic courses and refer to them as being students' individual choices. Extracurricular activities constitute a platform for students' knowledge and skill acquisition; hence, parental supervision also plays an important role (Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2012). Extracurricular activities are distinct from other after-school activities in that the school plays a leading role in organizing and promoting them (Farb & Matjasko, 2012). Based on these definitions, we may conclude that (a) there is a clear split between extracurricular activities and the formal curriculum—these activities do not take up students' obligatory study time, (b) students' engagement in extracurricular activities not only requires their personal interest in the activity but support from their school and parents.

Research Path and Questions

I mainly used Web of Science and the UVic Library's search engine to perform my research. At first, I used the search term “extracurricular activities”; this led to several thousand articles, which made it difficult for me to decide which articles were pertinent to my topic. Fortunately, the combination of the background of studies, my personal interest, and the definition of “extracurricular activities” enabled me to limit my scale.

Therefore, I chose “extracurricular activities” as my top keyword, “type,” “school,” “parents,” “involvement,” and “development” were used as assistant keywords to narrow my search. For example, “extracurricular activities,” “involvement,” and “development” were combined when reviewing the literature regarding the impact of students’ participation in extracurricular activities on their development. This approach works for the combinations “development” and “type”; and “development” and “parents” as well. I used the articles’ titles and abstracts to judge whether or not they were related to my research area and a quick review of their “Methods” sections to ensure the research was empirical. Once I confirmed an article was worth reviewing, I searched for it on Science Direct and then clicked the “other users also viewed these articles” button to avoid missing other related literature.

The hypothesis guiding my readings was, “The factors of activity type and parents’ involvement do affect students’ development in extracurricular activities.” This idea is enlightened by the definition of extracurricular activities as well; since they do not belong to the formal curriculum and there is no universal standard for them, activity type and students’ access to them vary depending on the school and teachers’ attitudes and guidance. Moreover, parents’ involvement also has a great impact on students’ development as extracurricular activities are normally taken as “adult-supervised activities” (Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2012). My focus is to review the research on extracurricular activities in depth and study how these factors make a difference—if at all—in students’ development. There are two questions leading the literature review:

1. What is the relationship between students’ levels of participation in extracurricular activities and their individual development and experiences?

2. How does parental involvement affect students' choices and performance in extracurricular activities?

In the following section, I review students' performance and development via their extracurricular activities, and how parents' involvement influences their participation and development in these activities.

Literature Review

There exists a large number of studies about extracurricular activities with a focus on students' participation, which may be affected by many factors (Forneris et al., 2015; Lipscomb, 2007; Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2012; Shulruf, Tumen, & Tolley, 2008). For example, some studies focussed on how different types of extracurricular activities lead to different individual developments (Guèvremont et al., 2014; Hansen, Larson, & Dworkin, 2003; Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006; Linver, Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009) whereas others measured the degree to which parents play a role in students' experience regarding extracurricular activities (Anderson, Funk, Elliott, & Smith, 2003; Hoyle & Leff, 1997; Mansour & Martin, 2009; Stirrup, Duncombe, & Sandford, 2015). Based on such findings, it is not difficult to anticipate that students' interest in activities can vary among activity categories, thus affecting their levels of participation and development. Moreover, parents' involvement in students' extracurricular activities is worth discussing. In this review, therefore, I provide answers to two specific questions: (a) What is the relationship between students' levels of participation in extracurricular activities and their individual development and experiences and (b) How does parental involvement affect students' choices and performance in extracurricular activities?

Levels of Students' Participation, Individual Development, and Experiences

This first section is driven by the overall research question, "What is the relationship between students' levels of participation in extracurricular activities and their individual

development and experiences?” This question aims at discovering from the literature current trends in students’ engagement in different extracurricular activities and the meaning of their participation.

Introduction. Extracurricular activities play a special role within school curriculum as they are not a part of the formal curriculum in many educational systems; however, the importance of these activities to students has been recognized by parents, schools, and universities (Stearns & Glennie, 2010). On the one hand, students who participate in extracurricular activities on a regular basis are more likely to develop their ability to explore self-potential and adjust attitudes, and as a result, they enjoy a higher level of academic and non-academic achievement than non-participants (Bundick, 2011; Darling, Caldwell, & Smith, 2005; Hansen et al., 2003; Larson et al., 2006; Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2012). On the other hand, students, especially in United States, are more likely to link their participation and experience in these extracurricular activities with improving the likelihood of being admitted to a prestigious university of their choice (Hansen & Larson, 2007). Therefore, both school representatives and parents make efforts to provide students with more access to extracurricular activities and adjust their levels of involvement to ensure students’ participation and individual development.

Students’ levels of participation in extracurricular activities can be affected by extrinsic factors such as students’ age, gender, cultural background, and family background. Activity type is the only intrinsic factor impacting students’ levels of participation in extracurricular activities and their academic and non-academic achievement. A large number of existing studies associate students’ participation in different activities with their development, and their findings show that different activities

may provide different academic or non-academic outcomes for students (Hansen et al., 2003; Larson et al., 2006; Martinez, Coker, McMahon, Cohen, & Thapa, 2016). Based on the literature review, there are at least three dimensions of interest: (a) students' participation rates and gender difference in different extracurricular activities, (b) students' profiles of individual development and experiences, and (c) comparison between students' development and experiences in different extracurricular activities.

Participation rates and gender difference in different extracurricular activities.

Students are encouraged to participate in various organized activities that fall outside the aegis of the official syllabus such as sports, performing arts, academic activities, volunteer activities, faith-based activities, and so on.

Review. Table 1 presents results from three empirical studies. It clearly reveals that sports are the most popular form of extracurricular activity, with over half of students involved in some sporting activities. In studies spanning over a decade, sports were represented as the most popular extracurricular activity for students. The two next-common activities for students are arts and academic clubs. In studies prior to 2007, students reported a 15% higher participation rate in the arts than in academic clubs. This phenomenon reversed in the most recent study—students valued their academic careers over the arts; however, in these studies, clubs are not limited to academic clubs but include hobbies and vocational clubs (Martinez et al., 2016), therefore, it is difficult to conclude that students are becoming more engaged in academic clubs in recent years. Regardless, the participation rates indicate that both arts and academic clubs were the two second-most attractive activities during more than a decade.

Table 1

Results from Three Empirical Studies Published between 2003 and 2016 around Students' Participation Rates in Three Main Extracurricular Activities.

Study	Sample	Participation Rate (%)		
		Sports	Arts	Clubs
Hansen et al. (2003)	450 high school students	55.0	37.0	22.0
Larson et al. (2006)	2,280 eleventh-grade students	62.1	45.4	30.1
Martinez et al. (2016)	15,004 high school students	54.1	22.6	37.0

It is clearly shown in Table 1 that the most popular extracurricular activity for students is sports; however, it needs to be noted that this phenomenon might be more typical in the United States, as sample studies were conducted in high schools there. In terms of numbers of activities students participated in, research shows that many students do not only participate in one extracurricular activity, over half of participants (70.3%) declared that they were involved in more than one type of activity (Larson et al., 2006). This percentage was even higher (79%) in another study (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005). The evidence of this fact can be seen in the fact that the total percentage of activities participated in is always over 100% if calculated together.

Other studies factored gender into participation rates in types of extracurricular activities (Darling et al., 2005; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Martinez et al., 2016). They consistently found decided gender differences in selecting types of extracurricular activities. For example, one study concluded that males have a statistically significant preference for sports over other activities ($F[1,1243] = 63.72, p < .001$); and females are more likely to participate in the arts ($F[1,1243] = 70.49, p < .001$; Eccles & Barber, 1999, p. 17). Darling et al. (2005) also concluded that boys value sports activities over other activities more than do girls ($\chi^2 = 48.7, df = 3, p \leq .000$). These studies indicate that activities requiring teamwork, leadership, and enthusiasm such as sports are preferred by boys, whereas activities requiring precision and patience such as the performing arts are preferred by girls. In terms of general participation rates in extracurricular activities, females ($M = 1.54, SD = 1.19$) tended to choose more than one general type of activity than did males ($M = 1.21, SD = .90$; Eccles & Barber, 1999). This finding is in line with another study that indicated females reported to be involved in 1.93 activities on average, whereas males were involved in 1.62 (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005). Most studies found that females reported higher participation rates, but the differences were slight.

Discussion and caveats. The analysis of the preceding results show there is increasing research studying students' interest in various extracurricular activities and their preferences for different activities. The main trend based on their findings is that sports are still the most popular activities for students, but that students are also involved in the arts, academic clubs, and other activities (Hansen et al., 2003; Larson et al., 2006; Martinez et al., 2016). Moreover, students' preferences for different activities might vary according to gender, age, and racial background.

Findings related to gender differences state that sports are the most popular activities for boys, whereas girls' preferences lie in arts (Darling et al., 2005; Denault & Poulin, 2016). In contrast, findings on other factors are limited. One study suggested that there is no age difference in students' preferences for different activities (Darling et al., 2005). This may be because the data was taken from a group of middle-school aged students or high-school aged students who were of similar ages. In terms of differences due to ethnicity, several studies suggest that students from immigrant families are less likely to be involved in extracurricular activities than students born in North America (Bundick, 2011; Darling et al., 2005; Martinez et al., 2016). However, studies are infrequently focused on students' preference of activities in terms of racial background. When I was a child, extracurricular activities were rarely organized by schools in China especially in small cities, and many after-school activities were run by off-campus institutions. Therefore, students' engagement in after-school activities was dependent on their parents' opinions. In this respect, racial background and cultural difference are worth being discussed in future studies when considering factors influencing students' preferences for different activities.

Two sides of students' individual development and experiences. The preceding section illustrates that the majority of students participate in at least one extracurricular activity and that students' choice of activity depends on their personal characteristics (e.g., gender). In this section, studies concerning the changes students experience in their school life after participating in different activities are reviewed.

Review. Most studies focus on the positive nature of changes experienced by students involved in extracurricular activities, that is, how these activities promote students'

development. For example, as compared with traditional classes and playing with friends, one study found that students participating in extracurricular activities stood out in four areas: (a) goal setting, (b) putting in effort, (c) problem-solving, and (d) time management (Hansen et al., 2003). These four areas directly relate to personal development for students. They pertain to learning experiences related to self-discipline. Besides personal development, this study analyzed students' learning experiences related to interactions with others as well, which can be taken to be their interpersonal development. More than the non-participants, the participants in extracurricular activities reported to have more experience with teamwork and leadership. However, participants in extracurricular activities did not display any advantages over their peers who were not enrolled in extracurricular activities in forming diverse friendships (Hansen et al., 2003). Another study found that students' acquisition of practical skills and development of useful qualities were related to their individual experience, whereas applying social skills in team work were considered to be social experience (Denault & Poulin, 2016). This study found that participants in team sports develop both individual and social experience more than participants in individual sports, arts, and clubs. In addition, their findings suggest that when participants reported to develop more in the area of individual experiences (e.g., practical skills), their development in social experiences (e.g., social skills) were remarkable and that when participants were unable to develop their individual experiences, this had a negative effect on their development in social experiences.

Besides these systematic classifications, there are many studies that display the various benefits of being engaged in different types of extracurricular activities. Some studies still focus more on students' growth in terms of academic achievements, attitudes

toward school, and academic aspirations. Their findings suggest that participants in extracurricular activities achieve more academic benefits than do non-participants, and that they get higher grades and develop close connections with their schools (Darling et al., 2005; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Martinez et al., 2016; Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2012). In terms of forming connections with their schools, participants in arts programs in particular were reported to have higher levels of connections with their schools. This finding can be linked to another important finding that students who regularly engage in extracurricular activities are less likely to drop out of school early, which is a common phenomenon for high school students (Mahoney, 2000; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997; Stearns & Glennie, 2010). The logical connection between these two findings might be that participation in extracurricular activities maintains students' positive attitudes toward school and feelings of connection with the school, and they therefore enjoy their time at school and are less likely to skip school.

Many other benefits have been associated with participation in extracurricular activities, such as socio-emotional growth which emphasizes more on students' self-esteem, self-concept, and social-network building (Bundick, 2011; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Guèvremont et al., 2014; Kort-Butler & Hagewen, 2011; Patrick et al., 1999). Findings from these studies suggest that participating in sports and the arts enables students to develop higher self-esteem and they therefore show positive attitudes toward their future and purpose in life. Moreover, students who participate in extracurricular activities regularly form close bonds with their schoolmates, which allows them to handle emotional anxiety in a healthy way. On the whole, these studies all suggest that extracurricular

activities comprehensively promote students' developmental growth in practical and social skills, which are closely connected to a bright future for them.

However, some studies focus on the negative experiences students might have when participating in extracurricular activities; such as behavioral problems, emotional problems, and falling behind in their school work (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Guèvremont et al., 2014; Hansen et al., 2003). Behavioral problems such as smoking, drinking, and drug use were the main negative experiences that came with involvement in extracurricular activities; some studies concluded that those participating in sports were more likely to try these risky behaviors (Darling et al., 2005; Denault & Poulin, 2009; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003; Fredricks & Eccles, 2005). Most studies lumped all sports together in one group, but one study compared in-school sports with out-of-school sports. Their findings indicated that in-school sports are linked with drug use and community-based sports are linked with drinking (Guèvremont et al., 2014).

Not all research states that engagement in extracurricular sports leads to problem behavior. The former statement was reversed in several studies that reported that sports participants are less likely to demonstrate behavioral problems such as smoking and drinking as compared to students who do not participate in sports (Adachi-Mejia, Chambers, Li, & Sargent, 2014; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Pate, Trost, Levin, & Dowda, 2000; Rodriguez & Audrain-McGovern, 2004). These studies reported, for example, that students who participate in coach-supervised team sports on a regular basis were reluctant to try smoking, but drinking was not related to participation in sports or other extracurricular activities (Adachi-Mejia et al., 2014). Another study reported that sports

participants were less likely to use alcohol than individuals who were not engaged in sports (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006).

Discussion and caveats. Two sides to students' developments and experiences with extracurricular activities have been discussed. The majority of studies associated students' participation in different extracurricular activities with positive development (Hansen et al., 2003; Larson et al., 2006; Martinez et al., 2016). Based on these findings, students' participation in extracurricular activities encouraged self identification, social acceptability, application of skills, and increased academic performance. In contrast, students' negative experiences with extracurricular activities were discussed less, but it was found that the most common negative experiences were related to behavioral problems, and those participating in sports were the group most likely to exhibit problem behaviours (Darling et al., 2005; Guèvremont et al., 2014; Larson et al., 2006). Other negative experiences such as emotional problems were rarely touched on, though some studies found that participation in specific activities might promote hesitant attitudes or emotional fragility (Bundick, 2011; Larson et al., 2006). Therefore, students' negative experiences should be discussed more in future studies as students' positive development can be overwhelmed by these negative outcomes in some cases.

There exists a contradiction when discussing students' experiences with sports. Both the claim (i.e., participation in sports is positively linked to risk behaviour) and the counter-claim (i.e., participation in sports is negatively linked to risk behaviour) have been made in different studies. One study compared findings from eight short-term empirical studies and nine long-term empirical studies (Kwan, Bobko, Faulkner, Donnelly, & Cairney, 2014). They found 12 out of 17 studies stated that participation in sports is

associated with behavioural problems such as smoking and drinking. Another study reviewed 52 empirical studies (Farb & Matjasko, 2012); among those, 9 studies conducted research on the relationship between participation in sports and rates of risk behaviour. Only 2 of these studies stood on the counter-claim side (i.e., that participation in sports is negatively linked to risk behaviour; e.g., Fredricks & Eccles, 2006).

The reasons for this contradiction have also been discussed in the literature. When comparing the data in studies related to sports participation and rates of achievement and risk behaviours, one notices that the participants are not controlled variables. One study analyzed in depth the relationship between positive effects and participation in sports, and found it to be dependent on many factors such as type of activity, levels of participation, and social background. The positive relationship “is not, for the most part, a direct, causal one” (Hartmann, 2008, p. 4). This finding has been supported in many other studies. For example, students who played soccer on a regular basis were found to be more likely to exhibit problem behaviours, whereas those engaged in basketball, baseball, and individual sports exhibited fewer problem behaviours as compared to participants who did not engage in sports at all (Sokol-Katz, Kelley, Basinger-Fleischman & Braddock, 2006). Sports participants reported less alcohol use when some self-selection factors (e.g., race, gender, parents’ education) were controlled for (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006). This finding is consistent with another that found team sport participants use more alcohol than non-sports participants when mother’s education was measured as variable (Eccles & Barber, 1999). From this, we can assume that students from well-educated families are more highly associated with the positive effects of sports. It has already been mentioned that these

students are more well-equipped to benefit from positive development when participating in sports (Hartmann, 2008).

As stated in the previous section, many studies report obvious gender differences in students' preferences for activities. Gender influences were shown in students' profiles of development and experiences as well. One study indicates that girls who participate in sports achieve higher GPAs than girls who do not, whereas boys who participate in sports do not perform any better (Darling et al., 2005). Boys were found to be more likely than girls to exhibit behavioural problems such as drinking, smoking, and drug use when participating in extracurricular activities (Eccles & Barber, 1999), but this is a general social trend as well. Since boys and girls have different preferences for activities, it is reasonable to assume that they may also perform and achieve differently. One study looked at students' social interactions when participating in extracurricular activities, and found that boys integrated with their peers more quickly than did girls (Denault & Poulin, 2008). Hence, the influence of gender in students' development in extracurricular activities would be worth looking at in future studies.

Development and experiences in three main extracurricular activities. Findings in the vast majority of studies demonstrate that students participate in at least three types of activities: sports, the arts, and academic clubs. Thus, students' participation in these three activities and their development is discussed and compared with non-participants in this section. The review shows that the research results are highly contradictory. Some studies report positive developments arise from participation in extracurricular activities, whereas other studies report negative experiences (see Table 2). Moreover, the relative number of

studies reporting negative experiences differs across the three types of extracurricular activities considered here—sports, arts, and academic clubs.

Table 2

The Summary of Basic Findings from Empirical Studies Reviewed regarding Students' Positive Development and Negative Experience in Three Main Extracurricular Activities.

Extracurricular activities	Positive development	Negative experience
Sports	Initiative experience: self-image, self-esteem, self concepts (Guèvremont et al., 2014 ; Larson et al., 2006; Linver et al., 2009) Academic competence: higher test scores, academic aspirations, higher rates of graduation, lower rates of drop out from schools (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Lipscomb, 2007; Marsh & Kleitman, 2003)	Behavioral problems (Darling et al., 2005; Denault & Poulin, 2009; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Eccles et al., 2003; Fredricks & Eccles, 2005) CONTRADICTION
Arts	Self-cognition (Denault & Poulin, 2016; Hansen et al., 2003; Larson et al., 2006) Close connectedness with others and school (Denault & Poulin, 2016; Hansen et al., 2003; Martinez et al., 2016; Patrick et al., 1999) Better academic achievements (Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2012)	Hesitant attitude towards goal setting (Bundick, 2011)
Academic clubs	Better academic achievements (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2012)	Do not know how to deal with emotional problems (Larson et al., 2006)
	Low school drop out rates (Mahoney, 2000; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997; Stearns & Glennie, 2010)	

Review. As sports are represented as the most popular type of extracurricular activity for students, the relationship between students' participation in sports and their development mainly referred to the benefits of exploring their identity. For example, one study involving data collected from 3,768 Canadian high school students stated that those who participated weekly in both school-based and out-of-school sports reported that they were more likely to build their self-image in the process of doing sports (Guèvremont et al.,

2014). They tended to have positive self-positioning and showed high self-esteem when making choices. This pertains especially to male students as they compose the majority of participants in sports. This finding was consistent with another study that concluded that students who participated in sports on a regular basis were more likely to have global self-concepts than those who were reluctant to participate in sports or other activities (Linver et al., 2009). Therefore, students' regular participation in sports contributes to their levels of initiative especially in terms of setting personal goals and putting effort into endeavours (Larson et al., 2006). Participation in sports enables them to dedicate themselves to their goals and to have more power of volition. All these characteristics contribute to a positive outlook on life, that is, both the difficulties and developments push participants to make progress and to grow.

Many studies suggested that students participating in sports perform better academically than their peers who do not participate in sports (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Lipscomb, 2007; Marsh & Kleitman, 2003). This better academic performance means not only higher test scores, but also greater academic aspirations, higher graduation rates, and lower dropout rates (Hartmann, 2008). Specifically, students who regularly participate in sports improve their test scores more rapidly than those who don't participate in sports (Lipscomb, 2007). Moreover, sports participants are reported to have higher GPAs and are more likely to be admitted to full-time college (Eccles & Barber, 1999). Besides these concrete academic outcomes, sports activities enable students to identify with their school values and thus develop a close connectedness to their school, which can be associated with greater academic aspirations and competence (Marsh & Kleitman, 2003). These positive effects of

participating in sports might explain why it has been the most popular extracurricular activity for middle and high school students for decades.

On the basis of prior literature, students' self-cognition and their connectedness with others had been strongly related to their engagement in arts activities. Arts activities encourage students to self-reflect as the arts inherently are linked more to creativity than other types of extracurricular activities. Hence, many studies on students' involvement in the arts placed more importance on students' changing self-image (Denault & Poulin, 2016; Hansen et al., 2003; Larson et al., 2006). For instance, one study suggests that the development of students who participate in the arts is demonstrated by their developing identities, in which they recognize their efforts and thus value their activities, work, and themselves (Larson et al., 2006). This was also found in a study by Hansen et al. (2003) that concluded students' participation in arts is related to their self-knowledge experiences, that is, to have a clear idea of who they are and what they want to achieve through engagement in activities. Engagement in the arts, especially in playing a musical instrument, requires years of learning, practicing, and sharpening; it would be difficult for students to persist in if they were vulnerable to outside influences such as opposition from parents or peers. Thus, it is important for students participating in the arts to have a firm identity, especially when facing difficulties in order to avoid giving up.

In terms of connectedness with others, there is an interesting finding indicating that the arts provide students with opportunities to develop close connections with other participants in the same activity (Patrick et al., 1999). In an interview conducted for the study, the mother of a ninth-grade male student involved in learning to play several instruments said that students who participated in the same arts activity could have

emotions and create connections beyond the activity itself because they shared the same interest. This claim was supported by other arts participants, most of whom mentioned their group members or peers when asked who helped them to overcome difficulties or why they enjoyed the activities they participated in. Students' learning experiences regarding their interactions with others have been deemed to be interpersonal development in previous studies (Denault & Poulin, 2016; Hansen et al., 2003). It is not surprising perhaps to find that arts participants who reported having more experience in building close relationships with their peers were more likely to experience interpersonal developments (Patrick et al., 1999). Some studies suggest that students' connectedness with others at school also increases their connectedness and sense of belonging to their school (Martinez et al., 2016). Their findings indicate that when students participated in arts activities plus sports or academic clubs, they created more levels of connection to their school. In addition, students' participation in arts activities has also been connected with better academic performance as compared to student who do not participate in the arts, as arts participants are reported to develop better academic working skills and thus perform better academically (Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2012). In contrast, few studies link engagement in the arts to negative experiences; however, in one study of 201 ninth-grade students, arts participants were hesitant to set goals (Bundick, 2011).

Many studies found that students' participation in academic clubs have the most impact on their academic achievements. For example, one study articulated that spending one year in academic clubs provided students with opportunities to polish their reading, writing, and arithmetic skills, which lead to higher academic scores (Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2012). Moreover, participants in academic clubs were reported to achieve

higher test scores and were more likely to be admitted into college at 21 years of age (Eccles & Barber, 1999). These findings explain why schools typically promote academic clubs to students and parents tend to encourage students' participation in them. A negative aspect of participation in academic clubs was found to be that, compared with participants in other activities, those engaged in academic clubs reported less experience in dealing with their emotional problems (Larson et al., 2006).

Discussion and caveats. Many studies stated that participation in extracurricular activities enables students to develop various abilities. Concerning personal development, it has been found that students participating in sports and the arts are more likely to exercise personal insight as compared to participants in academic clubs (Denault & Poulin, 2016; Guèvremont et al., 2014; Hansen et al., 2003). They develop an accurate self-image to ground themselves in when exploring these activities. Moreover, arts participants are more likely to develop intimate connections with peers participating in same activities, and thus have more opportunities to develop their interpersonal skills (Martinez et al., 2016; Patrick et al., 1999).

In contrast, the achievements of students participating in academic clubs were found to only be linked to academics—their social development was less likely to be discussed in these studies. One study declared that outstanding members in academic clubs are able to perform better in other activities as the confidence they gain from the academic clubs enables them to make connections between the skills they have gained and activities requiring similar skills (Linver et al., 2009). The findings in this study points to the fact that the development of participants in academic clubs should not be restricted to academic achievements, their growth in other areas should be studied as well. Studies touching on

negative experiences, as discussed in the previous section, mainly discuss behavioral problems and pay limited attention to negative experiences such as poor academic achievement, emotional problems, and peer pressure. Therefore, future studies could focus more on the negative experiences linked with students' participation in extracurricular activities, which could then influence the school to organize these activities in order to prevent negative experiences and enable teachers and parents to offer more guidance and support in the future.

Parents' Involvement in Extracurricular Activities

My second main research question is, "How does parental involvement affect students' participation and performance in extracurricular activities?" This question aims to determine the role that parents play in guiding their children's engagement in extracurricular activities in order enable children to better enjoy and develop through participation in these activities.

Introduction. In studying education or specifically curriculum, researchers used to keep an eye on students' development, teachers' evaluations, or the relationship between students and teachers. It is true that curriculum consists partly of teachers transmitting knowledge and skills to students; however, parental influence on curriculum, especially on informal curriculum (e.g., extracurricular activities), has become a focus of research in recent years. The main reason is that students' involvement in extracurricular activities is dependent on parents' support, both materially and spiritually, as it does not fall under the purview of formal curriculum and requires extra expenditures (e.g., application fees and

transportation) and time (Ashbourne & Andres, 2015; Shannon, 2006; Simpkins, Vest, Dawes, & Neuman, 2010). Another reason is that parents usually hold high expectations of their children and they believe that being involved in specific extracurricular activities is beneficial to their children's futures (Anderson, Funk, Elliott, & Smith, 2003; Dunn, Kinney, & Hofferth, 2003; Stewart, 2008). This is especially true for authoritative parents as they tend to believe they know what activities are best for their children and they are eager to encourage or even force their children to participate in such activities so as to achieve future success (Ashbourne & Andres, 2015). This can be seen as a function of growing pressure on parents—although they realize if they put too much pressure on their children they will rebel and develop emotional problems, the skills and abilities they will develop via extracurricular activities are seen as being beneficial to their future and are more important (Stirrup et al., 2015). Therefore, parents' involvement in extracurricular activities and the influence of parents' involvement on students' participation and development in extracurricular activities are becoming significant areas of research. In terms of parental involvement, (a) parents' roles in affecting their children's engagement in activities will be discussed first and, based on analysis of these roles, it can be determined whether parents' behavior is born from (b) parental support or (c) parental pressure. The influence of parental support and pressure on students' participation and development is an important topic of discussion since parents do play an important role in educating their children and it is beneficial to children's growth if their parents provide them with proper concern and guidance.

Parents' roles. Parents now can be seen as occupying a role in students' educational careers. It is necessary for them to realize their role and modify their behaviour so as to encourage their children's positive development in the activities they participate in.

Review. Reviews of previous studies indicated that the majority of students reported to be involved in more than one type of extracurricular activity. Interestingly, a study found that parents tend to play different roles according to the different types of activities their children are involved in (Ashbourne & Andres, 2015). In their study, Ashbourne and Andres identified three possible roles that parents played when suggesting extracurricular activities to their children: (a) enforcer, (b) facilitator, and (c) encourager. The intent of the enforcer parent is to ensure their child engages in activities that will benefit their future or that is a common activity such as swimming that almost every child participates in.

Therefore, they push their children to engage in these activities regardless of the child's personal interests and frequently express dissatisfaction with their children's performance and development. The enforcer parent's actions are harmful to children's development. As one study concluded, parents may believe that putting pressure on students due to their poor performance in extracurricular activities will increase motivation, but results prove the opposite to be true (Anderson et al., 2003). Moreover, students are less likely to enjoy activities when they are burdened by parental pressure (Sánchez-Miguel, Leo, Sánchez-Oliva, Amado, & García-Calvo, 2013). Another study found that parents' (especially fathers) frequent involvement in their children's activities lead to reduced interest and negative development in their children, who thus gradually lost confidence in their abilities (Simpkins et al., 2010). This finding is in line with Dorsch, Smith, and

Dotterer (2016) who found that fathers self reported putting more pressure on their children in sports than did mothers.

As stated, parents not only act as enforcers. They can also play the role of facilitator and encourager. Parents who act as facilitators place more trust in their children and believe that their children's own interests are motivation enough for them to put in the effort and develop in their activities (Ashbourne & Andres, 2015). Encouraging children to explore their identity and potential was viewed as these parents' main responsibility in terms of their children's extracurricular activities (Stirrup et al., 2015). Although enabling children to guide their own participation in activities is beneficial to their enjoyment (Anderson et al., 2003; Hoyle & Leff, 1997), children's lack of goal orientation should not be ignored. One study stated that parental motivation has a great influence on their children's behaviours and motivation (Beiswenger & Grolnick, 2010). This finding can be connected to other studies which found that parental support is positively associated with students' increase in motivation to be engaged in extracurricular activities (Fawcett, Garton, & Dandy, 2009). Therefore, it is important for parents to not only have a positive attitude towards their children's engagement but to motivate them to achieve in their activities and to grow beyond themselves. Although there are numerous studies on students' levels of motivation and extracurricular activities, studies on the effects of parental motivation on children's motivation are still limited.

Parents taking on the role of encourager were found to be more likely to combine their suggestions with their children's ideas, which means they would guide their children to develop interests and participate in activities that they think would benefit their children's development (Ashbourne & Andres, 2015). The general claim is that parents encourage

their children to participate in specific activities that will develop abilities and skills that would be useful to their future. However, one finding suggested that parents' encouragement in children's participation in some activities was related to their own childhood memories and family histories (Stirrup et al., 2015). In this study, parents interviewed expressed that they encouraged their children to be involved in activities that they had participated in when they were young because these activities brought them happiness and taught them practical skills. Therefore, according to various studies, students are able to build more self-awareness in choosing their own extracurricular activities and maintain close family bonds by following their parents' paths.

Discussion and caveats. Overall, many studies indicated that parents' involvement in extracurricular activities was recognized as an important influence on children's participation and performance (Hoyle & Leff, 1997; Ryan Dunn, Dorsch, King, & Rothlisberger, 2016; Shannon, 2006). The findings suggested that some parental behaviors were linked to positive student behavior whereas other parental behaviors might decrease children's motivation. For example, these studies conclude that children are more engaged, achieve more, and experience more enjoyment in activities when their parents take on supportive roles, as they are able to transfer the encouragement and energy from their parents into their extracurricular activities. However, if their parents take on an enforcer role, children are more likely to have negative attitudes towards activities as parental pressure takes away from their interest and initiative (Ashbourne, 2013; Ashbourne & Andres, 2015).

Some gaps still exist in the literature on parents' roles in children's extracurricular activities, making it difficult to reach a common conclusion about which behaviors are

beneficial to children's development and which are detrimental. We therefore cannot provide a general standard for a parent's role in their children's extracurricular activities. This problem was discussed in Anderson et al. (2003). They found this depends on children's individual differences such as age, gender, and family background. Different children could have different relationships with their parents, which might mean that similar forms of parental behavior can be seen as supportive to some children and as pressure to others. Therefore, more variables should be created to explore children's feelings and reactions to parental involvement in their extracurricular activities, so that parents are able to better modify their behaviors and provide the most appropriate form of support to their children.

Parental support and its influence. Most studies associated parental support for students' extracurricular activities with financial resources, time, and concern, and their findings indicate that parental support plays a key role in affecting students' engagement and development.

Review. Parental support had a great influence on the number of activities children were involved in—the more encouragement they received from their parents, the more activities that they became involved in (Anderson et al., 2003). Indeed, parental support enables children to develop higher levels of adaptive motivation, which indicates that, the more positive parents are, the more children are likely to become active in extracurricular activities (Mansour & Martin, 2009). Parental support is shown concretely in their financial investment in and amount of time and concern spent on their children's activities. Family structure and mothers' education were also seen as important factors.

Financial resources have been discussed as a factor affecting students' access to extracurricular activities in many studies; family structure and parents' opinions of activities were highly linked to the amount of money they were willing to spend on their children's engagement in these activities. For instance, one study claimed that, compared to children from single-parent families, children from two-parent families were more likely to participate in extracurricular activities (Ashbourne & Andres, 2015). The reason for this could be that single-parent families tend to have lower household incomes than do traditional families, therefore, it is more difficult for students from single-parent households to be involved in extracurricular activities (Dunn et al., 2003). The majority of studies on parents based their research findings on interview data. According to their responses, although different parents have different expectations on their children—some value character development, some value contributing to their children's futures, whereas others value their children's current happiness, it is obvious that parents are more likely to invest their money in activities that they personally value (Dunn et al., 2003). As compared to the arts and academic clubs, parents' financial support was focused on most with regards to sports, as participation in sports is the most costly, with fees required for such things as equipment and professional coaching (Ryan Dunn et al., 2016).

Parents' investment of time and concern in students' extracurricular activities were included in the topic of parental support. Many studies found that parents spent time talking with their children in order to build an understanding of their progress and plans with their activities; the warmth students received from their parents was considered to be parental support that promoted their development (Anderson et al., 2003; Fletcher, Elder, & Mekos, 2000; Shannon, 2006). This type of parental support is shown most in

encourager parents as they believe in allowing their children to explore their potential when making their own decisions, and that parents should guide children rather lead them (Ashbourne & Andres, 2015).

With a higher rate of parental concern, students' motivation towards activities was likely to be ignited, thus leading to students' positive engagement and development. For example, one study described parental concern as "parental warmth" and "parental reinforcement," their findings suggested that children tend to develop more interests in specific activities and are willing to spend more time on them if their parents placed emphasis on these activities and cared about their feelings and progress (Fletcher et al., 2000).

One study found that mothers spent more time driving their children to and from extracurricular activities than did fathers (Dunn et al., 2003). This might be due to fathers' heavier workload, as one study found that parents who work too much don't pay attention to their children's performance in informal curriculum (Fletcher et al., 2000).

This finding suggests a connection to another general claim that students whose mothers have a higher academic degree are more likely to be involved in activities including sports, the arts, and academic clubs (Anderson et al., 2003; Eccles & Barber, 1999; Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2012). One study indicated that the participation rates of students whose mothers held a tertiary education degree were two times that of students whose mothers had a high school degree or less (Eccles & Barber, 1999). Since mothers tend to be in charge of their children's school life whereas fathers tend to be the breadwinner in many households (Vincent & Maxwell, 2016), there is no doubt that mother's education is more relevant to students' levels of participation in extracurricular

activities. However, this general claim should be updated as women's socioeconomic status is changing and mothers tend to work outside the home rather than being housewives. Thus, it is reasonable to anticipate that mothers' levels of education will have less impact on children's engagement in extracurricular activities in future.

Discussion and caveats. The majority of studies indicate that parental support has positive associations with students' higher levels of participation and development (Anderson et al., 2003; Fletcher et al., 2000; Mansour & Martin, 2009). The general claim is that parental support motivates children to participate in activities which leads to individual developments in children such as better performance in school, socially, and socio-emotionally. Besides, children enjoy activities more with support from their family. Conversely, the negative side of parental support has been noted as well, for instance, it can decrease children's degree of anxiety in activities. This is problematic because when students have lower levels of anxiety, they tend to be indifferent about their self-development, thus focusing more on the leisure side of activities rather than their personal development and experiences (Anderson et al., 2003; Hoyle & Leff, 1997). Thus, having a moderate degree of anxiety is beneficial to students' development in extracurricular activities. In addition, financial support from parents enables their children to expand their access to extracurricular activities and high quality equipment, thus enriching their learning experience and development. Therefore, many studies stated that financial support from parents plays an important role in encouraging students to be involved in more and higher-quality activities (Dunn et al., 2003; Ryan Dunn et al., 2016). As discussed, financial resources play an important role in children's involvement in sports activities in that they cannot persist without their parents' paying for extra training fees and

equipment upgrades. However, these studies failed to note the importance of parents' financial support in other organized activities. For example, the common phenomenon in China is that children's participation in academic clubs and arts activities demands a large amount of parents' funding as development in these activities is highly linked to students' future success. Academic clubs promote students' academic achievements and high test scores are essential for students to enter into prestigious universities, whereas participation in the arts enriches students' CVs. Therefore, in future research, financial support from parents in other organized activities such as the arts and academic clubs should be paid attention to.

Parental pressure and its influence. One study defines parental pressure as parents' behaviours toward their children's engagement and performance in activities that leads to children's negative response to these behaviours (Anderson et al., 2003). The preceding section looked at support from parents, and its influence on students was deemed positive, especially in exposing students to various extracurricular activities, encouraging them to be motivated, and allowing them to experience more enjoyment from activities. Conversely, in this section, most of the studies reviewed linked parental pressure with negative outcomes for students.

Review. Many students tend to have negative attitudes towards enforcement in extracurricular activities from their parents and label this enforcement as parental pressure. For example, in one study, over half of participants declared that their parents imposed a lot of pressure on them to perform in extracurricular activities and nearly half of these students were upset about this pressure (Anderson et al., 2003). In many studies, a large number of students reported that their parents' control over their choice of activities and high levels of

attention to their performance were major sources of pressure for them (Anderson et al., 2003; Dorsch, Smith, & Dotterer, 2016; Sánchez-Miguel et al., 2013). This pressure was related to students' lower levels of enjoyment—one study indicated that students reported less enjoyment when experiencing increased parental pressure (Anderson et al., 2003). That is, students are reluctant to engage in activities which their parents frequently discuss with them and are unmotivated to perform in activities in which their parents expect too much of them (Sánchez-Miguel et al., 2013). Therefore, students' levels of participation in extracurricular activities is negatively affected by parental pressure.

One study explored parents' involvement in their children's extracurricular activities. It suggested that parents mainly put pressure on their children's engagement and performance due to their high expectations (Stirrup et al., 2015). Based on their responses, it seems parents view educating their children to be happy and successful and facilitating their children's development as a parental responsibility. This is mostly true for enforcer parents, as they put pressure on their children because they believe it to be their duty to provide them with the opportunities that will enable them to have a bright future (Ashbourne & Andres, 2015). This finding is consistent with another study that indicated that parents have good intentions when encouraging their children to have experiences and develop, but they may not be conscious that this behavior is actually counterproductive (Anderson et al., 2003).

Although financial resources were mainly linked to parental support in many studies (see preceding section), one study found that students reported financial support as parental pressure if they knew their parents invested a large amount of money in their activities (Ryan Dunn et al., 2016). This finding raised the notion that students are less likely to

purely enjoy activities that cost their parents a lot of money, and they may feel pressure to perform well in these activities so there may be some type of return for the investment. Few researchers have conducted studies on this topic, but it could be a typical phenomenon in China as arts activities, especially instrument playing, are thought of as popular extracurricular activities by Chinese parents, and these activities usually require a greater financial investment than do other organized activities. Therefore, many parents tell their children to work hard at these activities so as to not waste their family's money. I believe that more studies around parental pressure should be conducted in this field.

Discussion and caveats. Based on these studies, it was found that parental pressure is associated with negative outcomes in most cases. The majority of studies stated that if parents force children to participate in activities in which they have little interest, children experience “amotivation” (Sánchez-Miguel et al., 2013) for these activities. This “amotivation” could bleed into students’ engagement and development in other activities or even into their school work (Dorsch et al., 2016; Ryan Dunn et al., 2016; Stirrup et al., 2015). A few studies also mentioned that if parents put too much pressure on their children regarding their performance and development, children develop higher levels of anxiety, which can be detrimental to children’s motivation and psychological health (Anderson et al., 2003; Shannon, 2006). In contrast, one study indicated a positive side to parental pressure. They found a close connection between parental pressure and children’s ego orientation, that is, parental pressure enables students to form an understanding of their personal effort and development when performing extracurricular activities (Sánchez-Miguel et al., 2013). In contrast to parental support, it is more difficult to label specific parental behaviors as being parental pressure since there are different variables

such as family structure, household income, and parents' education levels affecting children's perceptions of pressure. For instance, parents' financial investment was linked to parental support in some studies (Anderson et al., 2003; Mansour & Martin, 2009), whereas in other studies, children see financial investment as parental pressure and thus feel guilt (Ryan Dunn et al., 2016). In conclusion, many studies tried to correct for this problem by creating different variables to ensure the influence of parental pressure on student's performance in extracurricular activities was general; however, more comparative studies looking at how participation and performance varies in students who share different family backgrounds could be conducted.

Implications

Introduction

Before pursuing my Master's degree at the University of Victoria (UVic), I majored in primary education and spent half a term doing an internship as an English teacher and class teacher in two primary schools in China. During that time, my students' enthusiasm for after-school activities was a memory that has stayed with me the most. I still remember their cheers and shouts when I would tell them we were going to do some paper-cutting and paper-folding activities, and many students displayed better practical operative abilities during these activities than they did in traditional classes. In the following two subsections, I briefly review the results from North American students' participation and development in different extracurricular activities and parents' involvement in their children's activities and then link these results to my implications so as to provide suggestions to address problems present in these results.

Looking back. In the literature review section, my research questions lead me to focus on students, parents, and extracurricular activities. In terms of the relationship between students' engagement and their development, the findings indicate that (a) for the last few decades, the top three popular activities for North American students have been sports, the arts, and academic clubs and (b) students' development in extracurricular activities is mostly related to positive achievements but can also involve some negative experiences, and students' development and experiences vary depending on type of activity. In terms of the influence of parental involvement on children's performance in

extracurricular activities, the findings reveal that (a) students' engagement and development in extracurricular activities can be affected by their parents' attitudes and roles and (b) parental support is mostly linked to students' positive development, and parental pressure is mostly linked to students' negative experiences. These findings will lead into my reflections on promoting students' levels of participation and development in extracurricular activities in a Chinese context.

Looking forward. Based on findings from previous studies, students' engagement and development in extracurricular activities varies depending on type of activity and parents' involvement, which inspired me to offer suggestions to promote performance for Chinese students. Therefore, in this section, I will combine my internship experience with the literature review of North American studies to determine what school representatives, teachers, and parents can do to expand Chinese students' access to various extracurricular activities and provide them with proper support and guidance to encourage their participation and development.

In the first part of the implications that follow, "Extracurricular Activities in School," I am going to play the role of school representative and teacher in China, and design a new educational curriculum plan for extracurricular activities based on North American students' development and experiences. In doing so I will attempt to fix the gap I discussed in the literature review section. It is also of great importance for parents to modify their behaviors toward their children's extracurricular activities and achieve a balance between parental support and pressure. Therefore, in the second part, "Extracurricular Activities at Home," recommendations are provided for parental involvement in extracurricular activities. By gaining some insight from North American

parenting styles in the reviewed studies, Chinese parents might change their traditional way of educating their children about their engagement and development in informal curriculum.

Extracurricular Activities in School

According to the definition given in previous studies, the biggest difference between extracurricular activities in North America and after-school activities in China is that extracurricular activities take place on the school grounds (Farb & Matjasko, 2012), whereas the majority of after-school activities in China are organized by off-campus educational institutions. I was born in a small city in southern China and when I was a student, there were no extracurricular activities offered by our school. Most of our time on weekends was spent taking extracurricular classes. School teachers usually encouraged students' participation in these interest classes and those students were encouraged to display their talent in a campus art show. However, middle school and high school teachers wanted students to pay more attention to their academic classes and to not waste time in after-school activities. Fortunately, this phenomenon has changed in China. In recent years, extracurricular activities have been introduced as informal curriculum for primary schools and middle schools, especially in metropolitan cities such as Beijing (Zhang & Chen, 2014).

To foster their students into creative people rather than inflexible bookworm, schools should broaden their focus from being solely on students' academic achievements to incorporating their comprehensive development. As schools become aware of this, more

importance has been placed on the expansion of extracurricular activities. In this section, I will make suggestions in two areas: (a) curriculum planning for sports and (b) guidance for teachers in the arts and academic clubs. The purpose of these suggestions is to expose students to more and meaningful extracurricular activities and guide students to express and explore their identity when taking part in these activities.

Curriculum planning for sports. Previous studies indicate that North American students reported a high participation rate in sports—over 50% over the last few decades. Besides the enthusiasm students show for these activities, their participation in sports is closely connected to setting and achieving goals rather than only maintaining physical fitness (Guèvremont et al., 2014; Larson et al., 2006; Linver et al., 2009). Moreover, participating in sports allows students in China to break out of the sedentary lives they tend to lead due to the pressures imposed on them by the National Higher Education Entrance Examination. Therefore, it is necessary for school representatives to focus on providing organized sports for students and to maximize the benefits of participating in sports. I have come up with three steps school representatives can take to encourage students' levels of participation.

First, “market research” via questionnaire should be conducted so as to understand students' preferences for which types of activities. The questionnaire would list several types of activities the school could afford to offer. Students can tick a box next to those they're interested in, and leave suggestions in the blank spaces after each box (Table 3). This would give voice to students and allow them to feel more involved in making their own choices regarding extracurricular activities.

Table 3

Organized Sports for Students to Choose From

Sports: Basketball, bowling, cheerleading, cycling, martial arts, rock climbing, stretching exercise, swim team, yoga, other.

The literature review demonstrated that students' preferences in activities varies depending on gender and age, and that, generally, sports are preferred by more boys than girls (e.g., Denault & Poulin, 2016). Therefore, girls should be encouraged by the school to participate in sports. Advertisements that allow girls to understand and to develop their interest in sports should be displayed. The advertisements could feature famous women's sports teams and inspiring stories about how girls have won sports championships. To increase girls' interests in the advertisements, I would design a poster or ask several female sports enthusiasts to record a video to share their sport stories and to relay the positive changes they have experienced through playing sports (e.g. Figure 1). Moreover, in the "market research" questionnaire, some less active sports such as yoga and stretching would be added in order to encourage girls who feel hesitant to participate in rougher or more vigorous sports.



Sunshine Middle School Advertisements of Sports for Girls



Sunshine Middle School
School gym
2:00 p.m, Friday, Mar 3rd, 2017,
Do not say that you are a girl, you hate sports.
Sports are definitely not only for boys, we can do it.
Come and join us, you gonna love it!
www.sunshinesports.com

Figure 1. Poster of advertisements about sports activities for girls

I would like to introduce to sports such as rock climbing and cycling to students rather than traditional sports such as soccer, basketball, and volleyball. This idea is in line

with the findings regarding negative experiences in sports, namely that traditional group sports are related to behavioral problems, especially in boys. Students were found to be more likely to engage in detrimental behaviour when a group of peers is involved in one competitive activity (Darling et al., 2005; Guèvremont et al., 2014; Larson et al., 2006). The sports mentioned (rock climbing, cycling) are attractive to students of this generation. Soccer may have been one of the most popular sports for teenagers for years but children needs to be exposed to new activities as times are changing. One study mentioned previously discovered that parents want their children to participate in sports because of their own childhood memories playing that sport (Stirrup et al., 2015). School representatives should therefore provide students of this generation with the opportunity to create their own memories in these new activities.

The second step in curriculum planning for sports is to set up different levels of the same activity for students, with each student's goals considered as the standard of classification for each level. For example, the yoga class could be divided into three classes, (a) leisure, (b) shaping, and (c) professional. The leisure class would be set up for students whose goals include enjoyment experiences such as happiness in participation or forming friendships with schoolmates who share similar ideas and beliefs. The shaping class would be set up for students whose goals are to lose weight and shape their bodies. The professional class would be set up for students whose goals are to pursue yoga to a professional level. This idea is inspired from the general finding that students who participate in sports on a regular basis are more likely to develop initiative, goal setting skills, and self-positioning abilities (Guèvremont et al., 2014; Larson et al., 2006; Linver et al., 2009). Therefore, providing students with the opportunity to set goals before

participating in extracurricular activities enables them to achieve more development in their initiative experiences.

1. What do I most connect Yoga class to?

A. Happiness B. Personal goals in shaping C. Career goals

Figure 2. The classification questions for students to answer.

The final step in curriculum planning for sports pertains to students' engagement and development in extracurricular activities. In terms of engagement, students' participation rates in different activities should be focused on. We should collect data to assess the current situation and analyze students' tendencies so as to increase access for student involvement in those popular activities (e.g., Figure 2). The school representative also needs to rethink unwanted activities and make changes in order to either not waste school resources or improve these activities to increase their popularity. This suggestion is consistent with one study that suggested schools should increase the number of "slots" (availability) to ensure students' access to popular activities (Stearns & Glennie, 2010). In China, physical education was a part of the formal curriculum and students' performance would be marked according to competitive ability such as running speed and time to complete sixty sit-ups. Since extracurricular activities are defined as informal curriculum, students' development in these activities should not be measured by abilities and grades. When I visited Central Middle School in Victoria, the assistant principal stated that the purpose of the school's enrichment program is to encourage students to explore their own interests. Therefore, students' performance is assessed in order to encourage participation

and to increase their learning experience rather than to measure achievement. To address this aspect, schools could create a platform such as a seminar for students to communicate with their schoolmates in order to share their feelings and experiences, thus developing interests in different activities by learning from others' development.

Teachers' guidance in arts and academic clubs. The majority of North American students have interests in the arts and academic clubs as well and these two activities foster development in their participants (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Martinez et al., 2016; Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2012; Patrick et al., 1999). Studies have found that students in the arts show development in identity and initiative (Denault & Poulin, 2016; Hansen et al., 2003; Larson et al., 2006). The reason for this might be that the arts demand students to be creative and use their imagination, which enables them to self-reflect in the process.

I would ask students who have participated in the arts to be in charge of promoting their extracurricular activities. For instance, students who paint could design posters to promote visual arts classes and students who play instruments could record a demo to attract other students to join band. Students could explore many creative methods of expressing the attractiveness of their activities to their peers. The reason for asking students in the arts to do this would be to encourage them to be more involved in their activities as not only participants, but planners as well. Students would thus gain initiative not only from learning in arts classes but from the development side of the classes as well. This would differentiate school-based extracurricular activities from interest classes run by off-campus institutions as, in those institutions care more about making money than their students' development.

Another advantage of engaging in the arts is that participants have been found to be more likely to form friendships with their peers (Patrick et al., 1999). There may be some shy students in class who are less willing to get to know others. Thus, it is the teachers' responsibility to encourage students to make friends.

One method of enabling friendships between students would be to create discussion groups in class to provide students with opportunities to interact with their schoolmates. Many grouping methods can be applied such as picking names out of hats, grouping them alphabetically, and so on. Students can become familiar with each other when placed in different groups. The next and more important step would be for students to choose group members on their own. As the teacher, I would ask students to express their specific interest areas in front of the class, which would allow students to develop friendships with like-minded peers by doing the same activity in one group. This could also apply to academic clubs as—especially in the sciences such as mathematics, physics, and chemistry—these clubs emphasize collaboration of ideas. Moreover, I would offer shy students more chances to take the first step as they normally require more concern and encouragement. It needs to be noted that students would do activities in one group for several weeks, as they are less likely to form close and strong connections with their peers in shorter amounts of time, especially those shy students. This action is inspired from the definition of extracurricular activities that states, “establishing relationships with other students and teachers” (Stearns & Glennie, 2010, p. 307) is considered to be an important benefit—students' social development via extracurricular activities is valued as well by scholars.

With respect to the negative aspects of being engaged in specific extracurricular activities, findings suggest that participants in academic clubs lack experience in dealing with their emotional problems (Larson et al., 2006). I intend to address this issue by requiring that teachers pay more attention to their students' psychological growth and offer proper guidance to them. For example, at the onset, the teacher could prepare a work sheet (Table 3) to make note of students' classroom behaviours and make comparisons between students in order to link each student to their specific issues. Once teachers have an understanding of students' personal situations and problems, it is easier for them to help students to deal with their emotional problems. For example, the teacher could guide students who worry about their performance and achievement in activities to switch their focus from results to the process and their personal feelings and individual experience. Students' anxiety and lack of enjoyment when taking part in activities has been found to be associated with parental pressure (Anderson et al., 2003; Sánchez-Miguel et al., 2013), therefore, the teacher should communicate with parents in order to work together to help students to cope with stress.

Table 3

The Classroom Behaviors that Teachers Could Pay Attention to

- ✧ Students are positive in the class / Students lack energy to perform tasks.
- ✧ Students are willing to help others / Students are reluctant to interact with others.
- ✧ Students have stable mood in class / Students have irritable mood in class.

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Extracurricular Activities at Home

The second research question guiding my literature review regards the influence of parental involvement on children's engagement and development in extracurricular activities. Many studies found that parents tend to play different roles in guiding students' choices and performance in different activities and their behaviour could be taken as either support or pressure by children. Moreover, parental support is mostly linked to positive outcomes whereas parental pressure is mostly linked to negative outcomes. In this section, there are two areas of suggestion: (a) listen to children's voices and (b) transform parental pressure into parental support. The purpose of these suggestions is to offer Chinese parents good examples of modifying their behaviour and being involved in their children's extracurricular activities in a helpful manner.

Listen to children's voices. As mentioned, parents tend to play one of three major roles in their children's extracurricular activities: (a) enforcer, (b) facilitator, or (c) encourager (Ashbourne & Andres, 2015). In all three roles—although enforcer is seen as parental pressure whereas facilitator and encourager are seen as parental support—parents all have good intentions. As one study states, all parents want extracurricular activities to benefit their children's future, but sometimes they may fail to notice that their enforcing behaviours are actually reducing their children's motivation to perform in the activities and, even worse, that they are unaware of where their children's true interests lie (Anderson et al., 2003). Therefore, it is important to improve "family communication" in order to listen to children's voices.

To facilitate “family communication,” teachers could create a platform to facilitate parents’ understanding of their children’s honest ideas about different extracurricular activities and their preferences, and for children to reveal their feelings to their parents. I would plan to invite parents to come and play a game with their children on “parents’ visit day.” Prior to this day, I would encourage students to share fun stories or problems about themselves, their parents, and their extracurricular activities with me. During their parents’ visit, those students who are experiencing trouble with their parents regarding their choice of activities would take the lead roles in the game as they would be encouraged to tell their parents that they have no interest in those activities that parents find important and could share their passion for activities that seem ridiculous to their parents. Students who have fun stories or who overcame the difficulties they experienced due to having opposing ideas about extracurricular activities from their parents’ would be invited to share with their classmates and parents at the end of the game. The game would consist of two parts. The first half is called “Mom and dad, please listen,” which is designed to provide students with the opportunity to share with and become closer to their parents, and the second half is called “We are growing,” which is designed to eliminate parents’ worries about letting their children make their own choices. Note that the first part of the game requires students to reveal their true feelings to their parents, and both students and parents will need privacy to confess and process. Therefore, it would best for parents and children to perform the first part of the game in a private room, and after that, parents and students could gather in the classroom to listen to other students’ stories and experiences. In Figure 3, I provide a simulation of the game.

Location: Class 3, Grade 8, Sunshine Middle School

Time: 2:00 p.m, 10th March, Parents' Visit Day

Parents would be lead to a private room with their child. Parents would be asked to wear masks with gentle smiles on their faces.



Students would be asked to talk briefly about what they like and dislikes about their extracurricular activities and the problems they experience with their parents. Their talk should start with “Mom and dad, please listen...”

The darkness and barrier provided by the mask enables parents to reflect on what their children really want.

Simulated Activity

Elena (the student; nervous): “Mom and dad, please listen. I am a girl, but that does not mean that I cannot climb like the boys...”

Elena’s parents (deep thinking): What is our daughter saying? Does this mean we are not good parents? . . . Honey, of course we respect your choices, we just did not realize that...

Figure 3. A simulated scene of “Mom and dad, please listen...”

Parents would be asked to wear masks on their faces not only to provide them with the opportunity to listen to their children's voices unhampered by other stimulation, but also to give students the courage to confront to their parents due to the "smile" on their faces.

Findings suggest that students are more likely to report higher rates of participation and perform better in extracurricular activities when they have facilitator and encourager parents (Ashbourne & Andres, 2015). The communication games suggested might be more suitable for enforcer parents, but it is of great importance for all parents to pay more attention to "family communication" and get to know more about their children.

Communicating with children on a regular basis allows parents to build a deep understanding about their children's ideas, behaviours, and even psychological changes. Therefore, I would suggest that parents organize family meetings concerning children's extracurricular activities twice a month. These meetings should be informal and the atmosphere of the meeting should be relaxed and comfortable to enable children to share their joys and worries regarding their activities. These meetings should be about listening and discussing rather than criticizing. Parents could set up different themes for every meeting. For instance, at the beginning of the term, the theme could be "hope" and children could talk to their parents about their prospects in their activities. Mid-term, children might be losing enthusiasm for the activity. Thus, it is necessary for parents to provide proper comfort, encouragement, and reinforcement to their children under the theme "breakthrough." Coming up with appropriate themes requires parents to pay attention to their children's daily behaviour and psychological growth as well.

The family meeting would act as a platform created for parents and children to have a short discussion in which children reveal their true feelings to their parents and are open

to their parents' opinions and suggestions. For enforcer parents, the purpose of the family meeting is to eliminate misunderstandings about specific activities or their children's intention to be engaged in them so as to decrease the negative outcomes of parental pressure. For facilitator and encourager parents, meetings should focus on their children's progress in activities and offering guidance when children feel confused or lost. Listening to their children is a significant action for parents in order to achieve balance between these three different roles.

Transform parental pressure into parental support. Previous findings suggest that students are more likely to perform and develop when parents support them (Dunn et al., 2003; Fletcher et al., 2000; Shannon, 2006); whereas parental pressure can be detrimental to students' individual growth (Anderson et al., 2003; Sánchez-Miguel et al., 2013). Therefore, it is necessary for parents to encourage their children to be engaged in beneficial activities rather than force them to participate in activities they have no interest in.

Parental support for extracurricular activities is mostly linked to their investment of money, time, and concern. An action called "first and then" could be applied to enable parents to show their concern about students' engagement and development in extracurricular activities in a more helpful manner. This action asks parents to place their attention "first" on their children's initiative for activities and "then" on their progress and achievements. That is, parents should place more importance on their children's motivation and enthusiasm for activities, as the purpose of extracurricular activities is for students to explore their interests and potential. Students' initiative in their activities can make a big difference to their performance and development. Moreover, parents should "first" take students' aspiration in extracurricular activities into consideration and "then"

think about the long-term benefits of these activities or their own childhood memories and family stories. Parents can share their memories with their children and give them a sense of the energy these activities brought them, but children should be allowed to try new things and create their own memories instead of necessarily following their parents' path. Therefore, it is necessary for parents to encourage their children to make their own decisions about which activities to participate in; however, parents' guidance is still necessary. Last but not the least, parents should "first" concern themselves with their children's schoolwork and "then" concern themselves with children's individual development and experience in extracurricular activities. Unlike their mandatory courses for school, extracurricular activities are considered to be informal curriculum and are set up to enable children to explore themselves. Students' academic achievements in formal courses are always the priority, and parents ought to help their children to prioritize appropriately and achieve balance between school work and extracurricular activities. This will enable parents to act as facilitators and encouragers in guiding their children to those activities that attract them.

In terms of parental pressure in extracurricular activities, one study found that students feel guilty when they know their parents invested a large amount of money in their activities, as they are afraid of wasting their parents' money (Ryan Dunn et al., 2016). Parents should face this problem and eliminate their children's guilt. For example, they could design a "payment plan" which includes requirements their children can fulfill through their extracurricular activities in order to reduce the burden. The "payment plan" is designed such that requirements of students in activities are attached to a specific amount

of money, for instance, “participate in this activity for three terms” equals 200 dollars, “practice this activity after school once a week” equals 10 dollars, and so on (Figure 4).

Our requirement	Price
✓ Practice this activity after school once a week	\$10
✓ Identify what you have learned from the activity	\$50
✓ Make a new friend in the same activity	\$80
✓ Develop a new interest area in the activity	\$100
✓ Participate in this activity for three terms	\$200
.....	

Figure 4. The payment plan.

Once children complete these requirements, their efforts in promoting their performance and development in the activity can be viewed as the return to their parents’ investment. This action allows students to have a plan to promote their progress, achieve more, and develop useful experience, which can help to ease the pressure from their parents. This is a good example of how parents can transfer their complaints about the cost of their children’s activities (parental pressure) into motivation for their children to perform better in these activities (parental support). To reduce the negative influence of parental pressure, parents must realize that complaining to or criticizing their children will not promote achievement, and that encouragement is a more powerful motivation. Thus, parents should

think carefully about how they speak to their children about their extracurricular activities and switch criticisms into warmth.

Conclusion and Reflection

This study was designed to explore students' participation and development in different extracurricular activities and the influence of their parents' involvement. The levels of students' participation, individual development, and experiences illustrates that students' participation rates and achievements vary in different activity types and both positive development and negative experiences have been discussed. There was also found to be an obvious gender difference in students' preferences for different activities. Additionally, parental involvement does affect their children's performance in extracurricular activities. Facilitator and encourager parents tend to provide their children with more parental support, and their children participate more and perform better in activities. The behaviors of enforcer parents are mostly seen as parental pressure, which can lead to their children's lack of motivation and enjoyment.

In the implications, I suggested actions to be taken at school and home. To promote extracurricular activities in school, school representatives could gain an understanding of students' preferences for different activities and improve the less attractive activities based on "market research," thus providing students with opportunities to access newly developed activities and encouraging them to be more engaged. Moreover, activities could be divided into different levels for students who hold different goals for their participation and the assessment of students' performance in extracurricular activities should place importance on process and not only on results. These actions can be linked to the promotion of students' initiative. Teachers should pay more attention to students'

behavior in class and encourage them to express their feelings and ideas so they won't be dealing with personal emotional problems when performing extracurricular activities.

To promote extracurricular activities at home, there is no doubt that parents are of vital importance in guiding and encouraging their children to develop in their activities. Most importantly, parents should emphasize their children's aspirations for their preferred activities. Communication between parents and children should be encouraged, for example with the suggested game on "parents' visit day" and by holding family meetings, which enable parents to listen to their children. Another essential suggestion is for parents to strive to be facilitators and encouragers so as to increase their support and decrease pressure.

In reflecting on this project, I recalled my visit to Central Middle School in Victoria. To be honest, the idea of encouraging students to take enrichment programs such as taking care of an aquarium, cooking, and playing board games seemed crazy to a traditional Chinese student. In China, our time at school was spent on formal curriculum and academic achievements. When we entered middle school and high school, some minor subjects like physical education and music were replaced with Chinese and math classes. I used to believe that encouraging students to participate in enriched activities was viewed as a waste of time for the majority of Chinese teachers and parents. Although my personal interest in this subject started with enrichment programs, the similarities between enrichment and extracurricular activities inspired me to focus on this special informal curriculum. After working on my literature review section, I gained a lot from the empirical studies I read on this topic in a North American context. What impressed me the most about this research was the scholars' critical thoughts on extracurricular

activities that inspired me to think about them from various perspectives. Students' participation in activities does not always bring good performance and students' excellent performance does not mean that teachers and parents should ignore their state of mind when doing activities. In China, we paid too much attention to achievement; the process and students' experience in activities are sometimes of greater importance.

Another reflection is related to communication between parents and children when considering parental involvement in their children's activities. I used to hold the idea that Chinese parents force their children to be engaged in activities they feel will be beneficial to them as I was a "victim" of this in my childhood. When my mother forced me to do activities that I had no interest in, I assumed that she did not care about my feelings and ideas, she just wanted to give me a hard time. I thought she only cared about the certificate I would get from playing my musical instrument when I grew up. Although my ideas about the situation in China still existed because of the limited number of Chinese studies in this field, findings from North American studies enlightened me to the fact that parents all have good intentions when involved in their children's extracurricular activities. Sometimes they act as enforcer parents because they fail to realize the true desires of their children. This inspired me to reflect on the communication between myself and my parents about my formal and informal curriculum, that I used to think they put too much emphasis on school work and they did not understand me like my friends did. After reviewing studies in this field, I have realized children should share their ideas and learning experiences with their parents and parents should encourage their children to express their feelings and emotions. I wonder what would have happened if I had told my mother I hated the Erhu and I really wanted to learn piano. Would I be a pianist now? It

seems that communication between parents and children is of great importance, which could be the main reason I included suggestions to promote family communication in my implication section.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Limitations

The literature review focuses on North American students' levels of participation in three major extracurricular activities and their development and experience therein. Parents' involvement in their children's activities was discussed as well. In terms of the first research question, a limitation of this study is that students' performance in other extracurricular activities such as volunteer and faith-based activities were not discussed. With respect to parental involvement, parents' roles in guiding children's choices and development in extracurricular activities was not given too much attention; the scope of studies in this field is narrow. Moreover, I did not find studies in a Chinese context; it would be good to make comparisons between Western studies and Chinese studies.

In the implication section, my suggestions for curriculum design were based on my internship experience as a teacher in two primary schools; therefore, they may lack representativeness. The limitations in my suggestions for parents is that different family structures and parents' socio-economic status were not created as variables, thus making suggestions somewhat general.

Suggestions for Future Research

As discussed in the "discussion and caveats" section of my literature review, many detailed suggestions for future studies have been made such as studies on students'

negative experiences in extracurricular activities, parents' financial investment, and so on. For example, research questions such as "Does positive development outweigh the negative experience of participating in competitive activities?" and "Are students from less well-off financial family background more sensitive to parents' involvement in their extracurricular activities?" are worth raising and addressing. Therefore, scholars would be able to make comparisons between different findings when answering these research questions in future.

The implication studies should emphasize more on curriculum design in Chinese studies as extracurricular activities in Chinese schools are less popular as compared with Western schools, especially in the United States and Canada. My suggestion is that education scholars in China should still work hard to promote and improve mainstream activities; the expansion of other minor activities can wait until the promotion of informal curriculum is widespread across the nation.

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