

Lines with Reason:

Meanings behind Tiv Child Arts

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Appreciation

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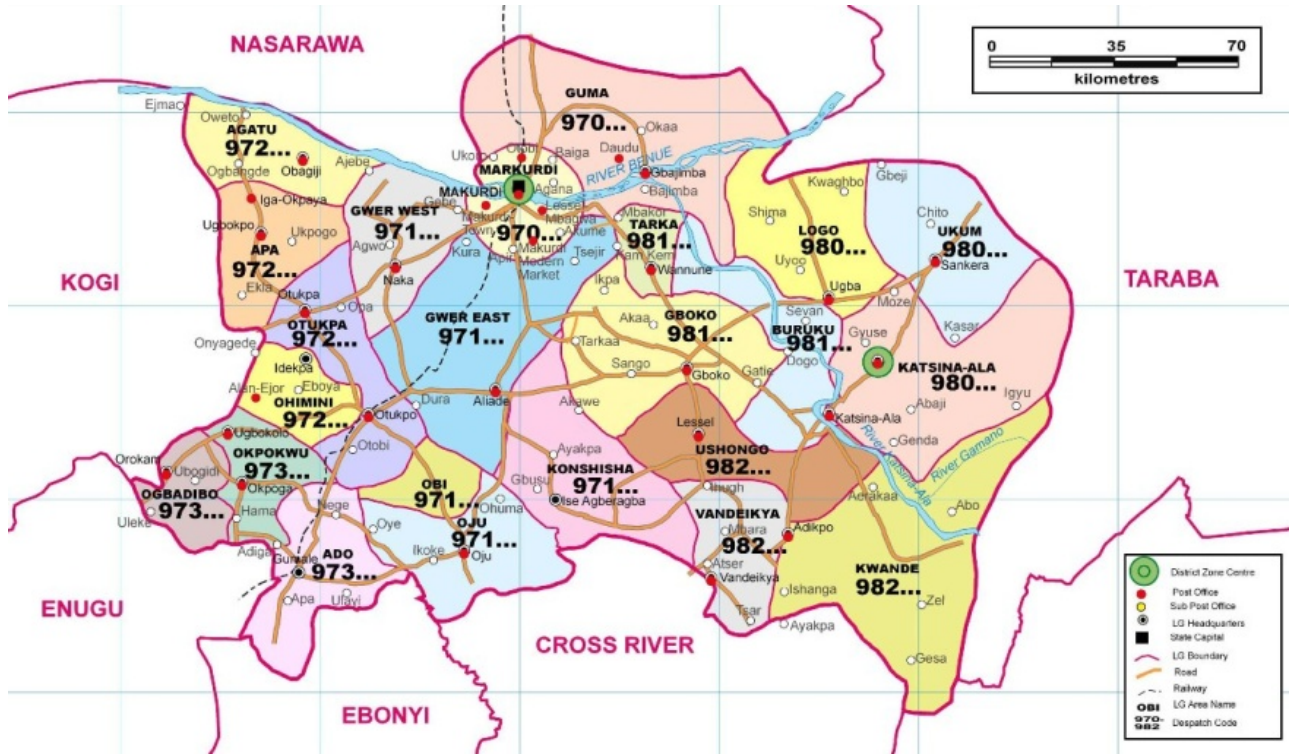
Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to Christ Jesus who has given my life a meaning.

Map of Nigeria



Map of Benue State, Nigeria



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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

“Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up... It took me four years to paint like Raphael, but a lifetime to paint like a child” Pablo Picasso

This thesis is an account of my eight months ethnographic research among schools and communities of the Tiv people of Nigeria. I lived among the Tiv children¹ to collect art created by children in my research. The interest for conducting an art related research is primarily because I am a visual artist. I must also state that the choice of ethnicity is also because I am Tiv which facilitated communication with children and adults in the area. The research was conducted with the hope to answer the question ‘What is the importance of Tiv child art in the life of Tiv children?’ It is likely for one to assume that child art is unimportant especially to Tiv children. On the flip side the assumption that Tiv child art is very important to the Tiv child. These assumptions are discussed as themes in this research’s findings aiming to ascertain whether or not certain claims are to be proposed or opposed. A closer look at Tiv children and their art reveals the problem each artist faces; how to tell your tales through your visual art expressions. Telling tales with their art suggests there are meanings behind children’s art, which leads to the title “Lines with Reasons”. The importance of this study is echoed by activities and documentations of centres which are like the Children’s Art Village in Ghana and believes that:

“The use of art in a child’s life can be a means for fostering self-awareness, self-confidence, self-expression and growth. Most particularly for children living in impoverished third world countries like this can also offer hope. We are all born curious, imaginative and creative, but these qualities cannot grow unless they are nurtured. The objective of the Children’s Art Village (CAV) is to encourage a child’s creativity by providing impoverished children who have undergone trauma, related to abandonment, the opportunity to participate in classes that will include art, music, singing and dancing” (Reyner, 2006).

Even impoverished children can make sense from the unfriendly world they live in. They create meanings as observed by Reyner in the quote above which is made possible by opportunity and attention is given to them. Adults might assume they have better answers to the questions of life; even those related to children. However everyone expresses him/herself for a reason, this is also experienced by children. This research explores the meanings and the importance behind the visual expressions of Tiv children, meaning can be diverse, a single expression can have various meanings. For example a single landscape can offer multiple perceptions to different people viewing the landscape at different stand points simultaneously.

Art can take on a new meaning depending on its context; it can be experienced differently by different people. Reyner (2006) explains this further “Children’s art is many things to many people. To a parent, art is a display of their child’s imagination. To an educator, it’s a teaching

¹ For the purpose of this study, the term child/children refers to people of between age 4 to 13 (except if stated otherwise). The projects conducted within this research for data collection were restricted to children between these ages.

tool. To a psychologist, art is a way to understand a child's mind. To a grandparent, it's a way to feel connected. To a librarian, it's a way to enhance book knowledge. To a child, art is a way to have fun, make decisions, and express choices". The above statement suggests that art lives a life of its own and takes on different meanings depending on a given context. The last sentence of the quote above makes a very vital point as it highlights art as being fun; it is a means for decision making and choices of expression for the child. Art making and play for children might mean the same thing. The most appealing thing for them is fun is involved. There is a slim line between play and art making for children. It is not a coincidence that Reyner (2006) puts fun first in her quote; it is most likely that fun comes first on children's priority list. Once fun is removed in art creation then the children are often no longer interested. However the result of making art fun is not fun for fun sake since children often say a lot during the "fun" creation sessions. However the quote also mentioned "decision making and express choices", this suggests that there could however be some expressions of intentions in these visual art works of children.

The research I carried out on Tiv child art was ethnographic in nature. Ethnography and participant observation contributed to the processes and findings in this research. The effect of the researcher's presence in the field is quite "loud" in the research. This is also because as part of the methodology I decided not to go to the field with a script but rather allow a script to play out by itself². I am quite pleased with the evolution of a script eventually³, that which I would have never thought about, I mean where would I have created the unexpected(s) from. This is considering the documentary was not supposed to be a fiction. A lot of unveiling and processing went on in my subconscious during the ethnographic session. The mind took in experiences and processed even much more than I had planned. The entire experience yielded much more than reading a piece about a people. The piece in itself might be well delivered but the truth is the piece is an attempt to reproduce the ethnographic experience which cannot be fully captured even in an entire thesis.

This research also includes a 30 minutes documentary. The video is an attempt to capture visually the various experiences during this research. It includes various activities during the research; however it basically summarizes the children's activities during the art projects conducted in the course of this research. A large part of the documentary is made up of the shots as captured by the children through participatory video; one of the main research methods employed in this research. Participatory Video as a research method is further discussed in Chapter 3: Use of Methodology.

1.1 What This Research Refers to as Art

Defining art will always be a debate especially when one wants to have a single definition that would suit all spheres of art. This is because of the vast and encompassing nature of art.

² This is also considering that the research was also documented in form of a documentary. The documentary was deliberately created without a post-production script.

³ The documentary was as a result of the natural unfolding of activities during the ethnographic research among the Tiv children.

This research has narrowed down its focus on tangible art. This is mainly due to the following factors: first, lack of time to collect and analyze all spheres of Tiv child art and secondly the fact that analyzing all expressions of Tiv children from tangible art to poetry to performance and all others can be over whelming and may eventually become too broad.

When considering the different ways anthropologists might help to explain what many of us regard as artistic behavior, we would very likely ask them the question: what is art? The question can be interpreted in two distinct ways. On the one hand, it demands to know the criteria by which objects that are often seemingly incomparable, such as Michelangelo's *Last Judgement*, Damien Hirst's dissected cow in formaldehyde and Australian Aboriginal Dream Paintings can be similarly classified as 'works of art'. The pursuit of common qualities that can bridge the divide between such distinctly different objects is sometimes referred to as a *generalisingsystem*. (Svasek 2007:3)

The above quote illustrates how art expressions can be quite distinct from each other. There are different mediums for defining, understanding and analyzing art shows. Generalizing system as an idea can be used to put together these diverse artistic ideas. However generalizing does not make it simpler, in fact it clearly exhibits the complexities of understanding art generally. As mentioned earlier coming to a single concluded definition of art can be very tricky. Art is very broad and rather than define all spheres of art in a single phrase, I will narrow down to and define the art forms related to this research.

Defining tangible art in terms that are too specific leads to the problem of a too limited definition. This can be said to be the case with Osborne's definition of art. "In the simplest sense, a work of art has certain physical properties. It is made of a material (e.g, wood, marble, clay, paint on canvas, and ink on paper) which possesses texture, contains shapes, occupies a portion of space, reflects certain colors, and is apprehended over time" (Osborne, 1968). This definition narrows art to only visual and tangible objects whereas the general term "work of arts" should be more encompassing. Contrary to Osborne, Nkwi's definition of works of art is broader and includes more aspects.

"Works of art in general are more than aesthetically pleasing objects, more than feats of manual skill and ingenuity. They deepen our insight into others and ourselves; they sharpen our awareness of our own and others moods of thought and religious creeds; they enlarge our comprehension of alternative and often alien ways of life." (Nkwi, 2005:133)

Art must be perceived as something beyond mere objects. They have a "life" and complex reasons why they were created. They give new meanings to life, they expound our understanding. It is interesting that art gives a new dimension to the context which it finds itself. Understanding art completely might be quite complex however the more importance we place to art the closer our attempt would be towards understanding art. A thorough understanding of art often requires examining the art, considering the context and possibly getting the artist's view about the art.

Fitchner-Rathus (2013) discusses art in segments. In fact, the very word art encompasses many meanings including ability, process and product. As ability, art is the human capacity to make things of beauty and things that stir us; it is creativity. As process, art encompasses as

drawing, painting, sculpture, designing buildings and using the camera to create memorable works. This definition is ever expanding, as materials and methods are employed in innovative ways to bring forth a creative product. As product, art is the complete work –an etching, a sculpture, a tapestry. Fitchner-Rathus’ idea of discussing art in three segments helps in the understanding of art in stages. Art as ability, process and product; these can be said to be three basic processes an art evolves through. Every art expresses some form of “ability’ by the artist often referred to as skill. Art often ends up as a “product” after it passes through an execution “process”.

“Many philosophers have argued that art serves no function, that it exists for its own sake. Some have asserted that the essence of art transcends the human occupation with usefulness”. (Fitchner-Rathus, 2013:3). Even for those who propel that art exists for a purpose are caught in the divide of how should art be analyzed."Others have held that in trying to analyze art too closely, one loses sight of its beauty and wonderment. These may be valid points to view. Nevertheless, our understanding and appreciation of art often can be enhanced by asking the questions ‘why was this created?’ and ‘what is its purpose?’". (Fitchner-Rathus, 2013:3). Without these questions a proper art analyses may never be possible. Questions of what and why probe further to the actual reasons why an art form was executed in the first instance; this could lead to reconstructing the context within which the work is or was produced, which gives a more holistic understanding a tangible piece of art.

“Common sense deriving from everyday experience also contributes to what is said or thought about these matters. The word “art” is like the words “love” or “happiness” in that everyone knows what they mean or recognizes what they refer to, but, when pressed, finds them difficult to define with consistency or wide application”. (Dissananayake 1988:3-4). The complexity of defining and understanding art reflects in the way the term is used. People often use the term art according to their feelings but the same people might not be able to pin down a single meaning to the term. Art is often easier understood, recognized identified and even experienced rather than defined. However for the purpose of this study art refers to visual expressions in either two or three dimensions and is tangible.

1.2 The Tiv People and their Arts

This study focuses on the Tiv speaking region of Benue State in Nigeria, West Africa. Igirgi (2007) says “Tiv can be understood as referring to a person, a people, and a culture. The word Tiv can also prefix to features and items identified or associated with the people” Igirgi goes further to specify that “the area occupied by the Tiv lies in the Benue Trough of Nigeria’s Middle Belt Zone, stretching from 6o30’N to 8oN, and 8oE to 10oE” (Igirgi, 2007). Although its people are dominantly confined in Benue State, a large population is found in Nasarawa and Taraba States of Nigeria. Tiv people are imbued with rich culture of dance, music, food and outstanding visual arts, particularly experienced in the *Kwagh-hir* festival which encompasses most of the mentioned art forms. *Kwagh-hir* is a major festival among the Tiv people. It is a fusion of cultural dance and puppetry exhibition. Hagher (1990) writes:

“Constructed from the Tiv culture as patterns of action showing the people's understanding of their life, how it -was, how it is at present, or how it should be, hence, these are replete in the immense artistic and aesthetic creativity projected by the use of colourful and spectacular masque, costumes and props in the puppetry display of this popular theatre aesthetics” (Hagher, 1990).

This goes further to emphasize how this experience formulates thoughts and imageries. The *Kwagh-hir* was another form of replaying the Tiv's life and history in theater. This experience of mechanized puppets and acrobatic stunts, mostly watched at night with a dramatic effect of lights from burning grass was one which people waited in anticipation for. The experience plays a role in the understanding and representation of the Tiv culture and visual expression for both foreigners and the Tiv people themselves. *Kwagh-hir* alone showcases a variety of the art spheres within the Tiv such as: in drawing, painting, sculpture, dance, songs and other forms of performance. Nyager (2011) writes:

“It features both giant puppets (ubermeronmettes) and smaller ones which are manipulatable on mobile platforms. In addition to this, *Kwagh-hir* features masquerade displays of both animal and human representations. The mask is therefore an important feature of *Kwagh-hir* theatre and sculpturing an equally dynamic super-activity/element in *Kwagh-hir* theatre” (Nyager, 2011).

The *Kwagh-hir* festival is one of the most popular aspects of the Tiv people. The festival is a puppet and dance show organized in a competitive manner where by communities turn out at an agreed venue to showcase their various dance and performance. It is mostly performed in a theater-in-the-round. The dance category also showcases several masquerades who display acrobatic performances with very colorful masks most of which are carved in wood. The word *Kwagh-hir* is also used among the Tiv to refer to storytelling. These stories are usually told in the evenings when most times the head of the family would gather the children around a fire for the mythical stories. These stories were told with lots of illustrations and folk songs. Most of which were also performed during the *Kwagh-hir* festival.

1.3 Why the Choice of “Child Art”?

I grew up in a family where my father believed in family reunions. He made it a culture that we always traveled to the village every holiday to celebrate with the extended family. This gave me a balance in life because I grew up in the city but became well informed about the culture and traditions of the Tiv people (which is where I hail from). I was thrilled that during my visits to the village, children had very interesting ways of expressing themselves. My peers and relations were very eager to tell me tales at night; tales they would tell with rigor, excitement and fun. They were never tired of repeating the same tales with all the songs that accompanied them. Apart from the folk tales they had various ways of expressing themselves; some would have their body painted, some would draw murals on walls, and others construct vehicles. I was astonished how they were able to express themselves freely and innovate functional objects from discarded materials at an early age. As time went by and

my interest in art grew it became a bit more worrisome to me that these various forms of art and self-expressions in their hundreds in a single community were not documented. Imagine wonderful drawings on a ground which would be wiped out in seconds by wind and rain, not even a photograph of it were made. As an artist today I can trace back my interest to some memorable experiences I had before I clocked age five. The biggest motivation for me was the fact that my parents never made me think that art was less important than any other subject in school. This gave me an internal boost. I in turn continually think about what would happen when these children's art is encouraged.

It is most likely that Tiv children have participated in art productions for very important outings like the *Kwagh-hir* and similar art exhibitions. However it is very difficult to ascertain this claim and if some oral tradition has suggested this then it is also challenging to measure or pin point children's contributions since the entire production is not documented. Oral tradition holds just a little of it which is fast fading due to other trending tales. There is also hardly any literature on the art of Tiv children; which is also one of the motivations for this research. Children's art could be an inspiration in the creation of some of the art productions for the *Kwagh-hir* festival considering that some of the folklore themes are either for children (to help them understand the stories easily) or are child-related. They could even contribute to the actual production as they always rally around the adults to give a helping hand or learn a trade.

My interest for researching Tiv child art is built from my personal experiences and observations about the importance of child art and it is nursed by my literature exploration about child and play, storytelling and narratives on child art without forgetting I am a visual artist.

1.4 Another kind of Language

A picture is often worth a thousand words. Visual images communicate emotions and complexities that words cannot. The ability to communicate non-verbally is particularly important for children. Art is a powerful tool that gives children the ability to express their thoughts and emotions long before they can fully express themselves with words (Reyna 2006).

Child art as a way of communication is a kind of language which many might not understand. In an attempt to understand child art there might be a need to use modules designed to assist the understanding. Some researchers have developed modules to help read the child's mind. These modules are to assist in reading the thoughts children communicate through their art.

Today artists accompany art exhibitions with huge catalogues, videos, paper presentations and other publications to aid the understanding of their art. So why is it assumed that child art would be understood at a glance when they are also responding to their feelings to a changing world like any other artist. Understanding art is complex and in most cases the artist has an important role to play to help the audience understand. During art interpretation and appreciation the audience is free to think in one direction and the artist in another. What

would the artist in this context who is a child living in a world where he does not have the privilege to publish exhibition catalogues, present seminars or write articles then what happens to his initial message of the art? Reading child art requires a sort of expertise as Pablo Picasso one of Europe's most renowned artists confesses "It took me four years to paint like Raphael and a life time to paint like a child".

Picasso wrote "Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up." Is children's art an act of genius? Are children more creative than adults? Perhaps Picasso was simply impressed by the spontaneity of children's art. Child art, like most child behavior, it's direct and uncensored. A young child doesn't critique his work – he paints freely and with pleasure, enjoying the fine and gross motor experience of moving paint over paper and watching lines, shapes and colors come to life. Art puts a child in the "driver's seat" and provides freedom: the freedom of choice, thought and feeling (Reyner, 2006).

Child art can be analyzed in different forms one of which is the developmental stages of the child. There are varying views as to how these developmental stages should be studied. Some findings about developmental stages are very general while others are very intricate, for a simple understanding of the sub divisions of the stages I will highlight Edward and Day's ideas. The two modules are:

Betty Edwards (1979) defined the stages of the child art development into four main stages as follows:

1. Scribbling Stage. (2.5-3.5 years).
2. Formation of the Picture Stage. (3.5-5 years).
3. Complication Stage. (5-10 years).
4. Realism Stage. (10 years and above).

In a study conducted by Hurwitz and Day (1991)-(1st edition in 1958), they classified the developmental stages into three main stages:

1. Manipulative Stage. (2-5 years).
2. The Symbol Making Stage. (6-9 years).
3. Pre-adolescent Stage. (10-13 years).

The studies above illustrate the complexities and stages of understanding child art. When attention is not paid to child art the outcome is similar to living in a foreign country where the language sounds alien. Understanding a new or foreign language has to do with paying attention and learning the basics. Child art must be seen as a language which is very 'tender' just like the children themselves. A simple scene depicted by a child can reveal a lot when one pays attention and understands the basics of understanding the art as a language.

Art Therapy and Visual Metaphor

"...invisible monsters that gnaw away at the inner self, creatures that destroy self-esteem and leave in their wake anxiety and pain. For children from violent homes, the monsters can be an abusive parent, neglect, incest, and severe emotional trauma." (Kathy Malchiodi, 98:4)

Meaning making in art has set principles which should be followed. One of the key attitude is to approach the art expecting a meaning just like everyone listens to a language hoping it has a meaning. These developmental stages are even used to check the developmental abilities of the children in their everyday living and health. Checking their developmental stages in its own is not bad however, it is quite limiting when the assessment of a child's visual expression is based only on this. This is because creativity has a large room for experiment and even children should be given the benefit of the doubt just in case they decide to experiment.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.0 Introduction

Most of the literature reviewed in this Chapter is related to child arts generally. There are a few publications about the Tiv people however there is hardly any publication about the Tiv child arts; a gap this research attempts to fill. This research was partly inspired by the fact that I am an artist and the fact I am interested in research related to child arts. I observed an absence of visual artists participating in the ongoing discourse about child arts. Most of the ongoing discourses about child arts are mostly from scholars that are non-visual artists. I have noticed that some of the discussions lack some insights as to the use of the principles and elements of design in an art. This research is an attempt to contribute an artist's view to the ongoing discussions.

Another very key importance of this research includes the fact that Tiv child arts would be properly documented. This documentation includes photographs, interviews, videos and written text about their inspirations, themes and why they do art. This research aims to be a reference material which would help other scholars who want to identify the gap in knowledge and research further.

It is very important to examine an already existing discourse in order to know where and exactly how to plug in your own contribution to properly spot the gap which my research intends to fill. It is important to delve into the existing discourses from other scholars concerning children and their visual art expressions. These sets of literature span generally from visual art, visual anthropology, visual and material culture, art history, art education and child psychology. This literature review discusses both the contributions of various scholars and a bit of some relevant methodologies to my research.

2.1 Literature Review

This research examines Tiv child art and attempts to analyze the meanings and importance behind their art. After reviewing a wide range of literature it is obvious there are little publications about Tiv art generally. There might not be publications specifically about Tiv child arts however there has been quite a number of literature related to child arts generally. This section highlights the ongoing discussions on a number of themes which are related to child arts, creativity, storytelling, play and art, visual based arts, narratives, content analysis, child psychology and aesthetic theories.

This literature review has discussed three (3) main issues which are: 1. Anthropology and art as similar research methods. 2. How child art is perceived and 3. Whether there is a wrong or right art. The entire literature review is divided into these three (3) themes.

2.1.0 Anthropology and Art as Similar Research Methods

The research was ethnographic in nature and studied the art of Tiv children. The research combined some methodologies which involved both art and anthropology. Art and anthropology might seem quite different from each other however there are still some underlying similarities that have aided their co-existence in research. “To some degree, the sharing by both anthropology and art of a “problematic of postmodernism” (certainly not exactly the same problematic, but with resemblances nonetheless) has made their historic relationship more explicit and obvious” (Marcus & Myers 1995:19). Even by way of practice artists and anthropologists both exhibit similar characteristics. “Both art and anthropology rely on observational skills and varying forms of visual literacy to collect and represent data. Anthropologists represent their data mostly in written form by means of ethnographic accounts, and artists represent their findings by means of imaginative artistic mediums such as paintings, sculpture, filmmaking and music” (Preiser, 2010:58). The shared observational skills of both disciplines make it clear that they can be both used conveniently in a single research. The extensive time in the field during the ethnographic study enabled me to have enough time to figure out issues which would usually be quite difficult to solve if one was to observe the art works at a glance without employing ethnography. As Preiser notes, “Both anthropology and art can overcome the limits that are inherent in their representational practices... which anthropology and art can work together in offering solutions to problems of presentation that emerge when dealing with complex issues” (Preiser 2010:58). The study of visual arts and anthropology are two diverse disciplines which all have their own procedural approaches. Understanding these procedural approaches also mean understanding the fact that these disciplines both have their strengths and weaknesses, the essence of merging the two in the research was to maximize their strengths and get the best of both ‘worlds’. Every research is expected to explore new ideas, most new ideas cannot be properly discovered and presented without huddles; huddles which Preiser (2010) refers to as complex issues. The combination of their strengths created a more thorough approach which helped me in attempting to figure out the complex issues.

There have often been discrepancies about whether or not art projects can be used as a basis for acquiring data. “But can projects of arts-based inquiry be research based? They can indeed. In fact, many of the strategies employed by arts-based researchers resemble those of social science-based qualitative researchers. They may include interviewing, observation, participant observation, document analysis, member checking, and so on” (Tom Barone 2003:210). Art based inquiries has been seen as an independent activity to a research. This trend is fast changing as more researchers are now using art based-inquiries in their methodologies. It is interesting how Barone relates it to interviewing, observation, participant observation, document analysis and so on. Similarly the research amongst the Tiv children involved art-based projects which also required some characteristics of social science-based qualitative research (interviewing, observation, participant observation, document analysis, member checking, and so on) as described by Barone (2003).

2.1.1 How Child Art is perceived

This entire research about Tiv children and their visual arts stems from the fact that Tiv child arts has not been particularly studied to a point of deriving meanings and importance behind them. It is important to understand the meanings and importance of the art created by Tiv children. This could go a long way in influencing the response and reception by the general public. It is very likely people would react a bit more positively to the art created by children if they understand how valuable they are. It is very likely people and institutions assume child arts do not need attention until we attempt to answer these questions posed by Mendelowitz. “What do you think about childlike art works children create? When a child proudly presents you with a painting, do you enjoy the painting with the child, observe it, and discuss it together? Do you put the painting where other children, family, and visitors can see it? (Mendelowitz, 1953:3). The questions above are very challenging. They define real life situations and suggest serious debate themes about child art. Similar questions to the ones posed above by Mendelowitz prompted this research. Until we get to a point where everyone can begin to think positively and also answer yes to the questions above then there is still a lot of research and awareness to be done about child arts. The main reason why most people might not be able to answer yes absolutely to the questions above are most likely due to the fact that we have doubts about the abilities of these children. “Why should I be sure of the child’s art when he needs more training”? These kinds of expressions are even the core of the problem because every work of a child is in itself complete and therefore presentable. “However ‘abstract’ the infant’s drawing may appear to the adult, to him himself it is a correct rendering of a concrete, individual object for detail” (Ehrenzweig, 1967:6). The “abstract” nature of the child arts only seem abstract to adults but very perfect and complete to the child. These ‘abstract’ art works become more appreciable when we try to understand just how the child views the forms around him. This related to the fact that most art created by children especially those that “seem important” are complemented by the children’s narratives, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 4. Ehrenzweig (1976) explains that while the infant experiments boldly with form and colour in representing all sorts of objects, the older child begins to analyze these shapes by matching them against the art of the adult which he finds in magazines, books and pictures. He usually finds his own work deficient. The children soon begin to assess and condemn his work as he tries to compare his art with those of adults. “His works becomes duller in colour, more anxious in draughtsmanship. Much of the earlier vigor is lost. Art education seems helpless to stop this rot. What has happened is that the child’s vision has ceased to be total and syncretistic and has become analytic instead. The child’s more primitive syncretistic vision does not, as the adult does, differentiate abstract details” (Ehrenzweig 1967:6). This is a very important time when the children has to be educated about the fact that childhood and adulthood are quite distinct from each other in a number of ways especially in the amount of years and this difference would reflect in their thinking, perception and visual representations.

The high degree of doubt about the art works of the children by adults (which they often express) only goes further to discourage them from exploring their creativity. To a large extent this idea of whether or not a child’s work of art is right or wrong should be highly discouraged and possibly discarded.

“If the child has been properly supported in his aesthetic standards on the syncretistic level, the data awakening of his analytic self-criticism will no longer be quite so harmful. It will be useless and even wrong, to discourage the eight-year-old child from applying his new analytical faculties to his work. We have to prevent him from destroying his earlier syncretistic powers which remains so important ever for the adult artist. This might only be achieved by surrounding the child with highly spontaneous artists such as Picasso, Klee, Miro, Matisse etc.” (Ehrenzweig 1967:10).

Several people might not be doing enough when it comes to appreciating the creative efforts of children however there are some people who have consciously made efforts to encourage children with their art. Research has shown that even very simple attempts can really go a long way. “Many of friends have the charming habit of hanging children’s drawings and paintings in their homes and classrooms, and these rooms offer a pleasant and lively contrast to those where the walls are solemnly dedicated to adult masterpieces, or banalities, or both” (D N Mendelowitz 1953:3). Even today as scholars we are very much elated when we are celebrated. A professor who has a thousand publications still waits anxiously for that next article to be accepted for publication. I guess a child would be happier when his art and creative efforts are celebrated. Simple acknowledgements and appreciation can be a big boost for moving forward; this is a similar situation of boost, joy and anxiety when a child’s work of art is framed, hung or even just talked about by family to friends and neighbors. It is unfortunate that even the few families who celebrate the visual creativity of their children often do it unconsciously and do not know the positive effects it has on the children in decades to come. The meanings of art are based on the outcome of the art created. It is important to also consider some literature that discusses some of the influences that influence children’s decisions about their art.

An important aspect of this research’s methodological aspect is storytelling and narratives. During the research the Tiv children’s storytelling and narratives were often an explanation about their art. For a proper understanding the actual works and photographs were used during their narrations. This gave the informants and the researcher a clearer understanding as they were both able to match the visuals with the spoken words. There is a lot of power and emphasis when narratives are accompanied with photo elicitation. “Photo elicitation is based on the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview... Thus images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words... these may be some of the reasons the photo elicitation interview process elicits more information” (Douglas Harper 2010:13:14). Considering the kind of detail this research entails there was a need to facilitate the interview and narrative sessions with some photographs. This was a great tool in helping the children with some minute details which ordinarily they would most likely have omitted. “...photo elicitation enlarges the possibilities of conventional empirical research” (Douglas Harper 2010:13). Similarly to the use of photographs is the use of art works during interviews and narratives. This as a research method is what Harper also encourages “Most elicitation studies use photographs, but there is no reason studies cannot be done with paintings, cartoons, public displays such as graffiti or advertising billboards or virtually any visual image” (Douglas Harper 2010:13:14). Photographs (and art works in some cases) can seem to be very straight forward and self-explanatory however after a few words from the informants

it is often clear that it is not always what it seems. Using art or photographs often prompt a lot of diverse dimensions to an issue. The narrations which these photographs lead to often become a bridge for the researcher and the subject as often times the two are on opposite sides of understanding. Sometimes as a researcher in trying to analyze a work of art you just might misplace the value of the different elements and through the process of elicitation often helps one return to the right course. “Understanding what is relevant and irrelevant in a picture is not always plain sailing. Some factors impede perception of others; some distortions do not mislead the observer” (Kennedy, 1974:141).

2.1.2 Wrong or Right Art

“[parents] hesitate to encourage a child to paint or draw or model for fear that the child hasn’t enough talent. If you ask, “Enough talent for what?” you find that behind their thinking is a complex of concepts about “art” and “genius” and “special ability” and a fear that the child may not have whatever it takes to produce unusual or distinguished or important works of art” (Mendelowitz 1953:3).

People often think of creativity as a possession for only the talented, if creativity is understood as a ‘skill’ then it will be easier to understand that it can be developed and cultivated overtime⁴. “Children ought to first be encouraged to ‘just’ create. There is an imaginative exploration by the child of the world he sees about him, a creative copying of adults actions and conventions, a series of impromptu rehearsals that serve as preparation for eventual participation in the adult world” (Mendelowitz 1953:5). Children long to ‘meet up’ adulthood at a very early age; earlier than they should. Children copy adults consciously and unconsciously. This explains why adults subconsciously have a lot of influence on children. This emphasizes the importance of a positive reception the children must be surrounded with from the adults as early as possible.

If a child hesitates about expressing himself with paint, crayons, plasticine, clay, it is because some adult has done something to inhibit his free participation in these forms of play. Maybe the child has been scolded for scribbling on a wall or in a book. Maybe so much stress has been put on the need to color the picture book neatly and to stay within the outlines that the child is afraid to trust his not very well co-ordinated muscles. Maybe he has felt censure in a quizzical frown or a disappointing “What’s it supposed to be?” Or he has been shown the “correct” way to draw. The “correct” way is strange to the child and it usually becomes a pattern to follow instead of a means of expression. The need to draw in a way to please others obstructs his expression and eventually the child may give up trying to express himself through drawing and instead will repeat the patterns that constitute the adults’ idea of “correct” way to draw. (D N Mendelowitz 1953:5)

It will be very effective if the children are made to understand art as a way of self-expression which can take any form and is not based on “right or wrong”. Very often the presence of a professional artist in a household or a classroom arouses in the child a too critical attitude toward his own work. The child feels in competition with the adult, feels inept, and ceases to participate in artistic activity (Mendelowitz 1953:6). Mendelowitz’s study analyses the

⁴ Evaluating creativity is highly subjective and even most of the adults who criticize the works created by children (as not been creative enough) are not also trained professional artists.

disadvantages of professional artists who try to mentor children into being artists. The main problem as mentioned in the quote is in the “unforgettable feeling”. This negative feeling is similar to inferiority complex and it eventually develops into a habit of not wanting to attempt creating art. To avoid these awkward situations, parents, professional artists or art instructors must choose words very carefully and make it clear to the child that he is not wrong by making art in his own way. This point is stressed because on the other hand it is important to note that similarly it is also challenging for the adults to see art again as children now that they are used to the adult way of seeing and understanding art. “It is hard for adults, especially those of us who have been adults for a long time, to think about art as different from the way we view it” (Wilson & Wilson 1976:434).

Talent is often presented as something very sacred and it sounds like only a few are born with it. Every form of creativity could be learnt because talent is not hereditary. “Talents are not inherited; there are no genes by which artistic abilities are transmitted from parents to children; and the so-called talented child is often a child with only an average endowment of the intellectual, emotional, and physical attributes of the artist... Before long the child’s abilities have developed far beyond those of most children and consequently the child has a greater interest in the activity than do most children. This is called talent” (Mendelowitz 1953:11). The fact that children learn to develop their creativity reveals just how important their surroundings should be organized to spur them.

Wright illustrates it in two categories, a. non-verbal: graphic depiction, stemming from imagery and visual-spatial-motor memory; bodily-kinesthetic communication through ‘enaction’ and expressive gesture, and b. verbal: story creation, expressive vocalization and the use of sound effects to accompany the art work. Consequently, ‘telling’ seems a more appropriate term than ‘storying’ to describe the inclusive range of graphic and verbal voices of communication made available through graphic-narrative play. (Wright, 2007:2). This is the use of art by children to enhance their “telling”. They get quite excited when their visual creations prompt them to remember certain moments, reasons and processes of their previous art creations. The visuals also prompt the certain choices of words used even in the telling. The juxtaposing of the narration over the visuals is more or less a replay of the art making for the children especially when the narrator is the artist. Most of the literature reviewed so far has explained varying contexts, different reason, importance and methods related to child art research. As stated earlier this research is an attempt to analyze the meaning and importance of Tiv child art. A kind of research conducted with focus and a clear research question in mind.

The literature review has attempted to make very clear the fact that 1. Anthropology and art are very similar research methods and have been both employed by researchers over time. 2. The review also presented how child art has been perceived over time as observed by researchers. The review also highlighted options of how child art should be perceived and 3. The review also attempted to present contexts where child arts have been termed as either wrong or right. The concluding part presents options of how children and their art should be assessed and analyzed.

2.2 Research Questions

The main research question is: What are the meanings of Tiv child art in the life of Tiv children?

The sub questions are:

- How does Tiv child art increase the Tiv child's self expression?
- What motivates Tiv children in the production of art?
- How can art produced by Tiv children be understood and interpreted?

In trying to answer these questions an ethnographic research has been conducted in schools and homes in Tiv communities paying special attention to her children and their arts. To evaluate the importance of anything one must first of all highlight its content. This research has attempted to understand the meaning of Tiv child arts within the Tiv society by employing content analysis as one of its main theories to enable the researcher deduce the values (in the process of meaning making) of the art works created by children. For a proper conclusion about the importance of these arts within the Tiv society attention was paid to the narratives of the children. This is because in an attempt to answer the research question (which is mainly the importance of Tiv child art to Tiv children) it would be unfair to conclude without considering the views of the children who are the artists as well as the subjects for this research.

Apart from the main questions, the research attempts to answer more questions, which together make up the sub questions. The questions are: How does Tiv child art increase the Tiv child's self expression? What motivates Tiv children in the production of art? How can art produced by Tiv children be understood and interpreted? Using these questions as a guide during this research makes the entire research and its findings a thorough approach. These questions to some extent overlap and all together assist towards a deeper understanding of the meanings of Tiv child arts within their context. The analysis of the Tiv child arts collected in this research will eventually contribute in understanding why Tiv children make art, how some of their expressions can be interpreted and why they should be encouraged to express themselves through art even more.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Every research needs a firm theoretical base. The discussion about theories explains in details the theories used in this research. It is interesting how a number of relevant theories have been employed for the success of this research. There was a careful consideration for a proper fit in terms of theoretical approach and the initial purpose of this research. First and foremost conceptualism was considered very useful. The reason stems from the fact that conceptualism deals with two main aspects which are "nature of art" and "purpose of art". "Conceptualist claim that art lies not in the object itself but in the artists idea of how to form it... Because art and theory for the conceptual are one and not two, the primary sources, viz., statements by the artists themselves, serve both as examples and as interpretations of conceptual

art”(Morton, 1983:9). This research considers the nature and purpose of art as very crucial in understanding the art of Tiv children. The nature tells of the forms and other physical attributes of the art works (this relates to the elements of design) while the purpose deals with the intensions of the artists which are nonphysical (and relates to the principles of design). The purpose of the art is investigated in this research through narratives while the nature of the art is considered and supported by the theory of content analysis.

Content analysis has been employed in this research to make a comprehensive analysis of the forms contained in the art works. The use of content analysis is because of the initial emphasis the research places on the contents of the art works of the children. In an attempt to answer the main research question for this research it will be almost impossible without a proper analysis of the works of art itself. “A possible specific forms of such a content theory would be one according to which artworks generally were to be identified with the intentional, expressive, stylistic or formalistic, and subject matter-related content embodied in or resulting from, acts of intentional artistic expression by artists” (Dilworth, 2007:19). This theory allows the researcher to evaluate the works collected as data in various themes ranging from intensions, forms, subject matter and so on. These themes together make up the core content of an art which is needed to understand the importance of art in any given context and in this case the Tiv child arts.

The issue of whether or not art needs to be interpreted is important. Some scholars and artist argue for while others argue against it. “That art is always *about* something is also a principle around which whole books have been written--Nelson Goodman’s *Languages of Art*⁴⁶ and Arthur Danto’s *Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, ⁴⁷ for example”. Very briefly, this principle holds that a work of art is an expressive object made by a person, and that, unlike a tree or a rock, for example, it is always about something. Thus, unlike trees or rocks artworks call for interpretations. I am of the opinion that the art critique (in this case a researcher) is free to analyze art works even if the artist (in this case child) has his own interpretations. Part of my hypothesis was that Tiv children have meaningful expressions and hence the expressions might be important to the Tiv society. This cannot be proven without a proper interpretation (analysis) of their art which can be aided by the artist’s personal view from interviews. This then leads me to approach art as interpretable.

The aesthetic theory is relevant in answering such questions. Children do a lot of imaginary drawings (art) which often starts with scribbling. The imagined images are related to the ‘invent graphic equivalent’ (modern aesthetics). Most of the forms created by children can be said to be invented. This is because in most cases during the art execution the children do not reference this forms in reality but create them from their imaginations. Another aspect of aesthetic theory is related to the art approach of “drawing what you see not what you (think you) know”. This idea of creating art influenced by what you see allows material culture to come to play. “This revolves around the significance of objects and their relation to cognition and symbolization” (Tilley, 2006). Experiences in life occupy our sub conscious and we often times recreate it in our expressions including art. Using aesthetics theory for me is more like coming to terms with the fact that a part of the Tiv child creates art as an invention and another part of them is influenced by their life experiences over time which is often the case.

The theories discussed above would be further complemented with narratives. Conceptualism, content analysis and aesthetic theory would be fully utilized when serious attention is paid to the personal narratives of the children who create the art. “All humans are storytellers. We have been telling stories since the beginning of time as a way of passing down beliefs, traditions and history to future generations” (Hamilton & Weiss, 1990). The narratives gathered in the course of this research contributes to the rich discussion about the art works discussed in this thesis. These stories serve not only as a venue for self-expression and communication with others, but also as a means of meaning-making out of the lived experiences. Furthermore the Tiv children’s conversational stories of personal experiences provide a site for the representation of self (Miller et al., 1990). In addition to dramatic play and oral storytelling, children show who they are through the visual arts. These activities also play an integral part in children’s self-expression. Children’s expression through visual text is a reflection on their experiences, their knowledge, and what they want to reveal about themselves. Art expression is a modality that allows children to communicate their experiences; it is a form of personal externalization, an extension of oneself, a visible projection of thoughts and feelings (Golomb, 1992; Owoki & Goodman, 2002) which this research intends to sieve amongst the Tiv children.

CHAPTER 3: USE OF METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This Chapter on methodology explains in detail the research methods used for this research and attempts to justify why certain methods were used. Some methods were preferred over others while others were used with some improvisation. The reasons for these improvisations are also explained in this Chapter. Research involving children needs a special handling of methodology. Graue and Walsh (1998) claim that generating data on children challenges one to be creative and find new and different ways to listen to and observe children, and this requires constant improvisation. There might not be a need to invent entirely new observational methods but there is sure a need to use the existing methods differently. Humans generally are difficult to work with because of their constant unpredictability. This is even more the case with children who exhibit it physically with their restlessness. Generally, people react to certain research methods especially when they include technological gadgets. These reactions occur all the more with children especially those in the rural areas who are not very conversant with electronics and its accessories; like mobile phones, video cameras, photo cameras, tape recorders, tripods, external voice recorders and so on. A large part of this research was conducted in a rural area and as a result most of the gadgets used during the research was alien to the children. This needed to be taken seriously and addressed appropriately. Research about and with children can be quite sensitive considering their age such that even the choice of language and words play a very key role in the entire proceedings and outcome of the research. There is a thin line between use of language and power play. The wrong use of language in terms of choice of words can communicate wrongly to the child and insinuate a boss to subordinate relationship between the researcher and the child. This is often the case as most times the researcher is older than the child. The researcher has to communicate clearly to the child that the research is just a meaning making session and would not in any way attempt to assess his/her art.

Barker and Weller (2003) talk about a child-centred research method based upon children's preferred methods of communication as one way of addressing the issue of power relations. Punch (2002) states that using methods that are more sensitive to children's competencies and interests can enable children to feel more at ease with an adult researcher. Fraser (2004) has pointed out that researchers must have a vocabulary and conceptions that relate to the child's conception of his or her world"(Klandermans & Staggenborg, 2002).

Considering my subjects and the context of my research (visual art based) there is a need to employ visual based methodologies which are mostly technological. This research has tried to maximize the advantages of these technologically based methods since just observing the visuals during the research would not be sufficient. As Collier notes, "Direct eye observation, without technology, has always been able to follow the rough dimensions of social movements, but the complexity of circumstances and also problems of identification of individuals can leave such observations incomplete and impressionistic. Camera observation offers accuracy of identification and objective detail; upon which to base judgments" (Collier 1986:243).

The main research methods employed during this research are participant observation, interviews, narrative biographies, photography, video, participatory video, chats and notes taking. The success of this research is vested in the fact that most of these methods were not used in isolation. Using these methods in a combined manner made it easier to improvise or

switch completely/partially from one to another when one seem not to be working as expected. Combining these methods do not only create a holistic approach to the data collected but can also be a great way to later confirm and cross check the data collected. For instance during some of the interviews with the children, some selected children were given the camera to make videos. This single kind of session was a combination of interviews, narratives, participatory video, notes taking and participant observation. This made it easy to cross check the information on the voice recorder, video camera with notes for clarity and confirmation especially during the post field. Since a single intension was caught on video, voice recorder and the highlights in my notes. The research methods used are all distinct from each other and all adds to spice in the different ways. There is a need to define them and also relate their individual role and importance in this research one after the other.

3.1 Participant Observation

Participant observation is one of the most primary research methods for any ethnographic research and it was not any different for this research. The idea of being present in the field is quite fascinating and gives the researcher a feeling that he is acquiring firsthand information. "Participation observation is research in which the researcher observes and to some degree participates in the action being studied, as the action is happening... Doing participant observation means deciding how to conceptualize what we see and hear in the field, and not simply applying a set of "nuts and bolts" observation techniques"(Klandermans & Staggenborg, 2002:120). Participant observation does not have a set of 'must do' list however there are aspects to be considered for doing a proper participant observation. I woke up in my field and tried to live my "research" life as usual and discovered that my "person" was in between "the research and myself". I really began to feel like an edgy peg in a round hole. As an artist I have, created an image which I live with daily. I have dreadlocks, a whole set of beads and metal bangles covering a large part of my left arm. I also wear very large ugly eye glasses which complement my biker boots. The looks alone had set me apart from the community and defined me as a foreigner especially when I was in the rural area. Everyone's suspicion that I was up to something was not farfetched with my obvious video camera with a microphone attached to it. Understanding the situation alone was prove that (participant) observation was already at work; as I observed the people they also observed me. It is important to note that first of all participant observation is usually not one sided.

Once in the field there was a great need to adopt the research methods to suit with my subjects. As I mentioned above about the importance of visuals in this research, I see participation observation as a "visual" method for research. I see the eye as a key sensory organ for observation, by saying this I do not mean to undermine the other sense organs but I strongly feel that, other senses are often employed after a "seeing" has occurred. A large part of observation is done by sight. To a large extent images in our sub conscious are mostly what we use to remember places and events overtime. In this research these (observed) images were complemented with photography as an added eye. "The camera is another

instrumental extension of our senses, one that can record on a low scale of abstraction. The camera by its optical character has a whole vision”(Collier & Collier 1986, p7).

In the course of this research I lived amongst the Tiv communities for about eight months, this was a challenging period as I was compelled to see the people beyond an ethnic group which I belong to but rather as a people which I was to understand and make meaning from the data collected. It was quite interesting to observe how the children make their art; their rituals and routines. The observations also included the surrounding activities, preparation of art materials, their challenges and mine, their attitude to work, their art techniques and so on.

3.2 Participatory Video

Participatory video as the name implies is very similar to participant observation; but in this case a camera is used instead. It is interesting to note that with participatory video the subject (informant) is doing the participation (with the video camera) as oppose to participatory observation where the researcher does the participation. This research method is also similar to video since they all involve videoing, however the slight difference is in the person handling the camera. This slight difference has a huge effect on the research especially the relationship between the respondents and the researcher which often affects the data collected. This is an interesting method to use in an ethnographic research as it gives both the informant and researcher participatory roles to perform. These roles create a synergy in the field between the informant and researcher and also lessen the informant feeling dominated. This creates a feeling of freedom which Nick Chris Lunch (2006) stresses, “Participatory Video (PV) which is an aspect of visual anthropology that enables/allows communities [in this case the children] to make their own videos” (Nick & Chris Lunch, 2006). The strength of this method is the fact that the people (in this case the children) record their interests which makes up a form of expression.

One of the biggest challenges of ethnography is the issue of intrusion. To a large extent one of the easiest ways to overcome intrusion is a long term ethnographic research where trust is built overtime. Intrusion during research is a concern especially when collecting data from children. This was a major setback I had anticipated and employed PV as a research to help curtail the issue as much as possible. Participatory video as a research method builds a great relationship between the researcher and informants; this is because the researcher hands over his camera(s) to his informants which show a high degree of trust. In the course of this research I experienced very speedy development of trust as I handed over my electronics to the children. In addition, the process of teaching the children how to use the camera also led to wonderful conversations and friendships within a short time. The need for this method in this research was to minimize intrusion as much as possible. I can remember vividly the change in atmosphere when I handed over the camera to the children without watching my back. They eventually become very free and lived their normal lives which were often exciting while data collection was ongoing concurrently. During these moments I also observed their likes, dislikes, and mood and so on.

Another advantage of participatory video is unlike conventional film, film experts who are trained to choose locations, arrange props, get their subjects and objects ready and also edit unwanted shots while in this case the children made their choices. In fact the idea of 'action and cut' from time to time when filming is to make sure that the best shots are produced to make it as professional as possible. It is interesting that participatory video describes this kind of film making as bias. Lunch & Lunch (2006) also stresses that participatory video advocates that the idea of one person or a crew of few persons deciding what should go and what should not during editing in most cases do not capture the actual intensions of the subjects⁵.

3.3 Interviews

Interview is one of the most important means of data acquisition; spending time together with an informant through a question and answer session. It is one of the surest ways to listen directly to the thoughts and expressions of subjects during field research. Usually researchers often have some preconceived notions and certain expectations about their research or informant, even before the research condenses these concepts are built up from previous observations and in some cases the related literature they have reviewed. Interview sessions are very great opportunities to give a fair ground for hearing. "Instead of producing definitive versions of participants' action or beliefs, interview data may be used to reveal regular interpretative practices through which participants construct versions of actions, cognitive processes, and other phenomena" (Sanna Talja, 1999). The interviews give informants the opportunity to give a firsthand perspective. This research employed interviews as a research tool to talk to adults and children about child arts. The interviews were very informal in nature, making the atmosphere very friendly and free of tension. The semi-structured interviews were constituted mainly of open ended questions. These open ended questions allowed for the informants to answer from their own frame of reference rather than being confined by the structure of pre-arranged questions and a set of options as answers. Bogdan and Bilken (Placeholder6) indicate the informants express their thoughts more freely during interviews. This freedom was evident in their gestures and willingness to grant even very long interviews.

Mayall (2000) and O'Kane (2000) have both noted that until recently researchers have conducted research on and about children rather than with children. Researchers now talk about research with children instead of research about or on children (Mayall, 2000; O'Kane, 2000), "that the adult tries to enter children's world of understanding, and her own understanding and thereby her agendas may be modified through the research experience" (O'Kane, 2000:111). The main difference with either doing research on or with children is to a large extent based on the handling of methodology. In this case, researching with children was achieved due to the fact that the children were allowed to participate and freely air their views and thoughts. The children were further involved in film productions as discussed above in detail under participatory video. Consequently, recent research with children and young people has moved from seeing children as dependent and incompetent; that is, as a person acted upon by others, to seeing children as social actors, participants and co-researchers (Christensen & Prout, 2002; Lewis, 2004).

⁵ In participatory video the term subjects refers to an entire community or at least a large part of a community.

The general success of this research was because the researcher refrained from general assumptions and paid attention to the interview sessions for firsthand information. The primary quest of this research was to explore the meanings and importance behind the art of Tiv children. Conducting this research with the children rather than just about them seem to be by far a better idea to relying on my observations and expertise as an artist.

3.4 Narratives

Narrative does not only provide a blue print for making sense of the world; it also guides action within that world. In other words, while narrative is a mode of representation, it is, at the same time, a mode of action. We use narrative to guide and shape the way we experience our daily lives, to communicate with other people, and to develop relationships with them. This is also true for young children who use narrative to experience and re-experience self in relation to others. (Ahn & Filipenko, 2007:287)

It is interesting how during this narrative sessions, children re-experienced themselves as they traveled back and forth their previous experiences. Research needs to look more closely at what children contribute to the narrative and how children's contributions influence their way of constructing the world (Ahn & Filipenko, 2007:288).

Narrative as a methodology played a very important role in this research. How can one get into the real world of children if he doesn't listen to them? The narratives as research methods are quite similar to interviews and storytelling; however it is more or less a combination which is aimed at listening to personal narrations of the informant. This was instrumental in the research as "Storytelling has been called the oldest and the newest of the arts. Though its purpose and conditions change from century to century, and from culture to culture, storytelling continues to fulfill the same basic social and individual needs. Human beings seem to have an innate impulse to communicate their feelings and experiences through storying" (Greene 1996:1). The narrative sessions were deliberately designed to listen to the biographies of the children as they narrated them. Their narrations often complemented their visual arts. Most of the narratives were videoed, the questions were open ended and the general talks were a buildup from the response of the children.

This research aimed at listening to the personal narrations of Tiv children; their life and the stories associated with their visual expressions. "For gifted young people narrative is the train engine which pulls with it the freight cars of tension and relief, emotions and feelings, repressions and sublimations, symbolizations and expanding aspects of reality". (Wilson & Wilson 1976:435). In fact the relaxed nature of the questioning sessions created more confidence for the informants. The non-threatening questions also eliminated all chances of worries from the informant. The narratives were very supportive for the eventual meaning making sessions for the data collected especially those related to the works of art. "The imaginary supports a master narrative, a grand, total, smooth, meta-story designed to give final meaning to cultural (here, educational) phenomena" (Tom Barone 2003:203:203). Even beyond the visual images showcased in the art works, the children narrated tales that led to the stories they created as well as tales that "would occur" after their depicted art expressions.

3.5 Photography

Reading people's ethnographic accounts are adventurous and through this, visual ethnography has taken us unconsciously to interior regions around the world which we most likely would not have visited. Our imagined presence in those places is not as a result of the written text in the research (which is in itself limited) but more in the images we see. Pictures are said to be worth a thousand words but I believe that when used properly it can even be worth a "million words". The power of photography is also because it is not limited by language barriers or geographical locations. The effect of photography as an aspect of reality is felt throughout the modern life. In a sense we think and communicate photographically. The nonverbal language of photorealism is a language that is most understood inter-culturally and cross culturally (Collier & Collier 1986: 9). The above expression captures the fact that images are in a world of their own and have a special value. In fact it is quite difficult to get a single and absolute measure of the importance of photography during research. Collier even goes further to compare the camera to our body senses "The camera is another instrument extension of our senses, one that can record on a low scale of abstraction" (Collier & Collier 1986: 7). The effects of images in our lives including research cannot be completely expressed. "Photographs can be an aid in preserving these vivid first impressions in a responsible and visual form... The critical eye of the camera is an essential tool in gathering accurate visual information because we modern are often poor observers. Its sharp focus might help us see more and with greater accuracy" (Collier & Collier 1986).

Photography is an art and also an "end" in its right. Photography is only a means to an end: holistic and accurate observation, for only human response can open the camera's eye to meaningful use in research (Collier & Collier 1986: 5). However as a methodology in research, photography as data opens up endless possibilities to general analyses, contributions and conclusions.

The viewing process is a dynamic interaction between the photographer, the spectator, and the image; meaning is actively constructed, not passively received. Barthes (1994) characterizes photographs as "polysemic", capable of generating multiple meanings in the viewing process. Bayers (1964) also argues in the same direction saying... the photograph is not a "message" in the usual sense. It is, instead, the raw material for an infinite number of messages which each viewer can construct for himself (Dona Schwartz, 1989). The fact that photographs are not static messages but rather a process to meaning making gives room for endless possibilities for meaning making. Their narrations also created background information which is not visually present in the photographs. The context created by the narratives gave new meanings to the works of art; this also implies that photographs could take upon different meanings and characters when they assume a new context.

3.6 Photo Elicitation

Photo elicitation as a research methodology was employed in the research. Some of the interviews especially the narratives were conducted while showing photographs and the art

works created by the children. Photo elicitation is based on the simple idea of inserting a photograph (or piece of art) into a research interview (Douglas Harper 2010:13:14). Barone also highlight the extraordinary contribution of the photographs to research, “The imaginary supports a master narrative, a grand, total, smooth, meta-story designed to give final meaning to cultural (here, educational) phenomena”. (Tom Barone 2003:203)

The inclusion of photographs in the interviews helped the children to recall some details they would likely have included in their narrations. “Thus, images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words” (Harper, 2010:13:). In the cause of the interviews, actual art works created by the children were used during their analyses. These works prompted elaborate discussions which would most likely not have been possible if the children have relied on their memory. It also encourages compassion where works from different timelines are placed side by side.

In other papers (Harper 1993, 1998) I suggest that photo elicitation be regarded as a postmodern dialogue based on the authority of the subject rather than the researcher. (Douglas Harper 2010:15) We often visualize a thought before the words come, or hear a word and many senses come to mind (e.g., visual, aural, touch, smell, taste). Commonly we use metaphors or simile to describe this cross-over of modes, such as when we talk about “imagery” in written text, or “perspective” and “points of view” in oral arguments (Johnson 1991). This emphasizes the importance of visuals in our subconscious which often occur involuntarily. Analysis and conversations are more or less descriptions of pictorial visuals we conceive in our subconscious. In simple terms ours speech is often an explanation of a conceived image in our subconscious, an exercise which is often automatic and involuntary.

Phenomenology addresses narrative as a significant tool for understanding experiences and emphasizes openness to a variety of meanings, the contexts in which meanings are created and diverse ways of viewing the world... Hermeneutics is based on the philosophical theory that, as researchers, we cannot obtain objective knowledge through research, but can only come to a greater understanding of a phenomenon through our engagement with a context, be it text or dialogue. Hermeneutics searches for questions and meanings that remain open ended (Bontekoe, 1996). As a researcher you often assume your opinions are objective until you listen to the research subjects, then you realize just how much subjective your seemingly objective views might have been. Discussions have an unlimited ability to open up meanings in unthinkable ways. It opens up the thoughts of both the researcher and the subjects of the research.

3.7 Video

Video as a form of surveys can enable a cyclical process of generating and validating discoveries. Video as a research methodology was quite effective in this research and I used it extensively. There are different kinds of films, one of which is documentary.

Documentary is one of three basic creative modes in film, the other two being narrative fiction and experimental avant-garde. Narrative fiction we know as the feature-length movies

we see in the theater on Friday night or on TV and video; they grow out of literary and theatrical traditions. Experimental avant-garde films are usually shorts shown in non-theatrical film societies or series on campuses, in art museums, or available in a few video anthologies; usually they are the work of individual film makers and grow out of the traditions of the visual arts. (Ellis & McLane 2005:1).

The main aim of using video extensively was to produce a documentary about the Tiv children and their arts. “Documentary, however imprecise a category, continues to indicate a body of media work with a rich, distinguished history and a wide range of current practice and creative commitments” (Rosenthal & Corner, 2005:1). Documentary is the most suitable form for this research. Characteristics documentary have characteristics that are distinct from other film types (especially from the fiction film) can be thought of in terms of (1) subjects; (2) purposes, viewpoints, or approaches; (3) forms; (4) production methods and techniques and (5) the sorts of experience they offer audiences (Ellis & McLane 2005:1). The documentary produced in the course of this research aims to become a reference material about the life, importance of art and culture of Tiv children.

During this research a large part of the filming was made by the children themselves. This was mainly to avoid intrusion (Nick & Chris Lurch, 2006). I incorporated participatory video to maneuver the problem of intrusion, “Participatory video, if used within carefully negotiated relationships, has potential to destabilize hierarchical power relations and create spaces for transformation by providing a practice of looking ‘alongside’ rather than ‘at’ research subjects” (Kindon, 2003). It is almost impossible to video children without altering their natural state of mind and way of behavior. Children begin to “act scenes” that are supposed to be natural due to the presence of a foreign presence (in this case the researcher the camera and crew). The choices of scenes also tell a tale about their preferences which makes up as a form of expression and leads to a rich video.

Although a large part of the research employed participatory video, there were meaningful sessions which I recorded myself. The camera can be an instrument of intrusion in an ethnographic research; here it also has loads of advantages. The thought of using video for this research is to capture the children in the act of making their art as natural as possible. “The pleasure and appeal of documentary film lies in its ability to make us see timely issues in need of attention, literally” (Nicholas, 1991:IX). The video(s) captured the working environment/conditions of the children. This gives a clear definition of the context which the works were created. The presence of the video camera creates a presence of ‘sophistication’. During field investigation the videoing created some form of excitement for the children. This was evident in their expressions and willingness to participate in even long sessions of filming. Understanding the environment also helps in an attempt to analyze the works of art as there are quite some connections between the art, environment and execution processes. Understanding the environment and its side activities other than the art production itself further complements the video as extra insight about their attitude to art and the entire research project.

The initial idea of employing photographs/art elicitation in this research was to eliminate the chances of leaving out details as much as possible. This is similar to the case of video as a

research methodology. This research has gone further to create a documentary which captures in visuals what words might not be able to explain. The documentary is a summary of the entire ethnographic research amongst the Tiv children. “Within documentary film projects, the period of research is sometimes described as the “preproduction” phase. In this phase, the filmmaker studies the people, culture, issues, and events that will be central to the film. But the preproduction phase is often indistinguishable from the shooting (“production”) and editing (“postproduction”) phases”. (Douglas Harper 2010:13). Every proper film production should follow the above illustration given above by Harper. The dissection above gives a clear ABC of the step by step stages a conventional film should pass through for a proper production. However I have to mention that this is for a conventional film production. There are some unconventional productions whereby there could be some modifications and adoption of other methodologies. The need for modification in this research is due to the adoption of participatory video (as a research method) to avoid intrusion since the research involves children. This point and participatory video are discussed in detail in Chapter 2: Methodology. As a kind of summary, this research adopts participatory video (PV) as a research method; this means that part of Harper’s theory is merged with participatory video. Participatory video for instance gives room for the filmed subject to do the videoing and editing (Chris & Lunch, 2006). The children were allowed to make their own video as they wished.

3.8 Chats

Chats as a methodology was a format I must say I really underestimated at the beginning. I knew it was useful but not as half effective as it turned out in the field. I was able to observe even while still in the field that chatting with people gave much unexpected results. There is an atmosphere an interview session creates which is absent during just chatting. Chats are very casual, they take place in very (un)common places, in fact they often take place (or least start) before we even notice. There is a “formal mood” that often becomes present as soon as a conversation is termed ‘interview’ especially during a research period, this mood can be described as tensed. This tension keeps both the interviewer and the interviewee at the edge. During formal interviews everyone participating becomes a bit more cautious. This in most cases has an influence on the data collected. In the cause of this research, during casual chats, informants easily gave away very vital information as a way of just saying, what can be called “thinking aloud”. This “thinking aloud” is often less expressed as soon as the atmosphere ceases to be loose and free to the formal “academic mood”. It was interesting when I tried to make an analysis of the data I collected from chats against those from proper interviews and was amazed at its valuable findings. The effects of chats as a research methodology in this research is a pointer to the fact that every research methodology has its own special effect and must be properly understood and used appropriately.

3.9 Notes

Taking notes is very important especially during research. It is alarming how much one forgets in a short time. I have heard several times that *the faintest pen is brighter than the sharpest memory*. This usually sounds like a mere cliché teachers use to get students to take notes during classes. I really found this important during this research. Referring to field notes does not only refresh the memory but also helps in reorganizing the chronological order of past events during the research. After a few weeks in the field I noticed that there were a lot of information gotten from observations and chats and talks which were not from interviews. These unexpected data had to be jotted down for further clues as to questions to ask, decisions to take and so on. I referred to the notes often to refresh my grasp on the activities so far in the field and plan ahead. These notes have been very useful even in the writing of this thesis as they are easy to refer to as I even cross check dates and quotes. In form of notes taking, I also took out time to write research summaries (which I sent to my supervisors back in the Netherlands while I was still in the field), research reports and to do lists. These were also part of the research and also very important, I used these summaries and to do list to plan further and work on my schedules. Notes taking also enabled me to apply reflexive methodology while in the field. This was because I took time away from data collection to reflect, meditate and plan further. One very helpful aspect of my note taking was the fact that while in the field I also worked with my previous notes; those taken during my pre field readings, classes and field preparations. This was a very great way to easily synchronize my proposed plans with my executions and as well check what was achievable or not.

3.10 Research Assistant

This research is conducted by a Tiv artist among the Tiv community. However I still employed an assistant considering that my research included terrains where I was not consistent with. I tried to minimize the chances of been perceived as a stranger from a foreign country wanting to take advantage of the people and the community. So I employed the services of a research assistant. My research assistant is someone I know for about three decades. My decision to work with him was due to his competence and I was privileged to work with an assistant who is educated and works with children. He is very popular in his community and everyone calls him “Sir” because he is a school teacher. As a school teacher my research assistant had unlimited access to the (because their parents trusted him) children in his neighborhood where we conducted the research. He is a very hardworking person with a lot of passion for work and academic research. We had spoken a lot on the phone even before I arrived in the field. This had given him the much needed insight about the research themes and concerns even before I arrived. He had already crafted out a work plan for the research prior to my arrival. During the research session there was hardly any issue of language barrier. This is because he is educated and also because the research was with children who do not speak any complicated Tiv (I also understand Tiv language) that needed a serious consultation for a proper understanding.

This research enjoyed the earnest contributions of my assistant. I often consulted with him on several issues like locations to explore, people to interview, schedules to meet informants, incentives to give participants, and his general take on the activities that went on. He also took some notes for me and also handled the camera at times when I was occupied with other activities.

CHAPTER 4: INTERACTIONS WITH RESEARCH SUBJECTS

4.0 Introduction

This Chapter is an attempt to present and analyze some of the art created by the children, looking into their environment, history of their personal life and art. The art collected for this research is analyzed in a number of ways. The first of these is based on the interviews I conducted with the children. The interviews which were filmed were centered on the art the children created. During the interview sessions I made photographs of the art (as I have discussed and explained in more details in Chapter 2) and also filmed the interviews. In this Chapter I present and discuss ten (10) interviews with school children with photographs to buttress the discussion. I have selected these case studies because they are distinct. My choices are also aimed to add variety to the entire works by the children I have presented. I add three (3) interviews with school proprietresses.

4.1 The ‘Big Small Day’

During the field work I discussed with my research assistant and we had a plan of putting together “a big day”: A day whereby children will create their choice art. This would be an artist in residency project for the children in Tyowanye. The information made the children all so excited. This was no doubt going to be the big day for the research, the researcher and the children. As the day drew closer it became obvious there was a bigger day.

My idea of the big day was; a day the children will not forget. A day parents would all gather and watch in awe. A memorable day for the community. A day the children would redefine their art. Then came the bigger day: The market day. The market day of that week made it obvious it was for sure a bigger day. This made me think deeply, I started observing the influence the market had on the community and how the children reflected it in their visual expressions.

As preparations for the big day continued there was competition for time and engagements. Some of which were:

Farming: farm engagements involved the children especially during holidays⁶. Most parents try to maximize the “free” time their children had while school was on vacation. This is because most of the school tuition and other fees were paid from sales from their farm proceeds.

Market Day: the market day puts every other activity on hold especially because it relates to people’s source of income. The market is also a platform for socializing, testing of one’s wealth and influence. In fact it is a gathering that is highly unpredictable. For most people in the community the day meant everything.

⁶ Most of the field investigation for this research was conducted when primary and secondary schools in Nigeria were on break.

Market Day Preps: this involves lots of activities including transporting goods, travelling, setting up props and so on. Other formal and non-formal meetings also took place during this time.

The market was obviously a bigger day and I wondered what would happen to our art residency projects. Surprisingly the children went out of their way to prepare for our organized “big day”, they would even stop us by the road side to confirm what was expected of them. This exemplified how eager they were to express themselves visually.

They waited in anticipation to “the day”. They came over to my room to make enquiries even days before the “big day”. Those older than the defined age (4 to 13) also insisted to participate. They spent their money to buy materials for the art residency project. They spent their time and energy. They came out en mass and participated whole heartedly.

4.2 Description of Fieldwork

I arrived in Nigeria and stayed a week in Lagos then proceeded to Ibadan. I spent about two weeks in Ibadan with some Tiv families. I did some participant observation and also asked them some questions. I carried out very informal interviews; more of chats with Tiv people living away from Tiv communities. I asked open ended questions to help me listen to general views about Tiv people and child art. I urged them to recall their experiences and what inspired them to create art when they were children. After some weeks, I proceeded to Makurdi and carried out more interviews (mostly informal) as well.

Makurdi and Tyowanye were my primary locations for the data I collected. I stayed for a month in Makurdi before I left for Tyowanye. While in Makurdi I visited several children in their houses to talk to parents and children about visual child art and child expressions generally. In my proposal I had emphasized the need to work with schools and art teachers. However, the first phase of field work was conducted when secondary and primary schools were on vacation. During the vacation I decided to work with summer schools. Several months afterwards, schools resumed from their vacation and I also visited them during their art class sessions. I visited Hearts and Minds Primary School Makurdi.



Plate 1: The front view of Beautiful Minds Makurdi

Linda is the proprietress of Hearts and Minds. She has made sure visual art is an important subject in her school. We had several meetings about my research and I visited the school twice. On my first visit I interviewed her about child arts generally and she told me about her experience of teaching children arts. We also talked about what inspires children the most and their most favourite themes. She stated that she has observed school children are excited about drawing themselves. Linda toured me around the entire school and I made pictures within the school premises paying attention to the art hung on classroom walls. We ended the tour with the sixth grade where I attended an entire art class session which was taught by Linda. It was interesting to see her teach art as an art specialist. I watched the children closely as they made their art. I took photographs and made videos during the class. After the class I interviewed five (5) children, three (3) of which I have presented in the case studies below (Kelvin, Hembadon and Mem).



Plate 2: Sixth grade school children of Hearts and Minds Makurdi preparing for a visual art class



Plate 3: This art is created by a group of school children in Hearts and Minds Makurdi



Plate 4: This art is created by a group of students at Hearts and Minds Makurdi

In Makurdi I also visited Shepherd Academy primary school. I had made arrangements to visit the school and interview the children unfortunately they had rounded up learning sessions and written their end of term exams and would go on vacation in about a week. I discussed my research aims with Teryima who is the head master and he toured me around the school. Most of the children were no longer attending school hence they had concluded their exams. The few that were around were rehearsing for their dance and drama for their end of term graduation ceremony. They were so engaged I could not conduct interviews with them. However, the headmaster brought out their visual art exam pieces, we had a general talk about them and I made photographs. Below are pictures of the exam pieces.



Plate 5: Some of the exam pieces by school children in Shepherd Academy Nursery and Primary School Makurdi



Plate 6: These sculptures are some of the exam pieces by school children in Shepherd Academy Nursery and Primary School Makurdi.

Finally I moved to Tyowanye in Buruku Local Government Area. Tyowanye is a village and a central point for people because of its popular market. The market is named after the village “Tyowanye”. I had a research assistant who we had long been communicating before I arrived. He had made arrangements about the research prior to my arrival. I lived in the same house with him and his wife. The whole Tyowanye village calls my assistant “Sir”, this is because he is educated and everyone knows him as a school teacher. His status in the community had given my research great leverage. Our compound was big, very free and open to children⁷. The compound was not far from the market square. I was also fortunate that my compound was not far from the primary school⁸ where my research assistant teaches at the same venue we conducted the art residency project. Participant observation in the community was quite interesting because the children were everywhere. I moved from one place to another within the community to take pictures, make videos, write notes, and also carry out interviews. I also organized an art residency for the primary school children⁹. We chose specific days and urged the children to come prepared to create art. They were given room to create anything (art) with anything. These sessions were also videoed by the children themselves¹⁰. The idea of handing over the camera immediately created an ‘air’ which instantly sealed a cordial relationship with the children. It was interesting the choices the children decided to focus on.

I woke one morning and saw the children playing soccer. I drew closer and saw that the ball was made out of rags. I videoed the soccer session, took photos and asked them how they came about the idea. They emphasized the need to become very creative when they cannot afford a real factory made ball.

⁷ The cordial relationship and openness was established even before my arrival because my research assistant is their school teacher.

⁸ Esomchuckwu Standard Nursery and Primary School Tyowanye.

⁹ The art residency project was particularly for school children. However who had not enrolled in school children also joined because it was in an open field.

¹⁰ This is Participatory Video (PV) to allow the children express themselves visually and through their choices of screen shots.



Plate 7: The rag ball created by children in Tyowanye.

A day to the art residency I decided to buy a “real” ball for them. I went over to their school and waited till when it was break time I threw the ball in the open air and it was amazing what happened next. It was a mix of wrestling and drama. I am very sure even the world soccer governing body FIFA might not be able to regulate such a scenario. A cluster of forty (40) male and female children all ran after the ball in the same direction at the same time. It seemed like anyone could score in which ever goal post they chose.

The Tyowanye market to some extent is to the children around the community as Times Square is to children in New York. The market has a lot of influence on the children. The market is operated with a fixed schedule with an interval of five (5) days. The market day hosts people in thousands; farmers, traders, and so many other business people who travel from far. The people regard the market day as a social gathering. There is a lot of music, fun, buying, selling, drinking, eating, sightseeing and negotiations going on simultaneously. It is hard to believe how silent the market square can be on non-market days. The hustle and bustle start very early on a market day as trucks and cars begin to arrive with people and luggage from far and near. The people wear their best clothes after waiting from the previous market day

The Tyowanye market as an institution to a large extent has influenced most of the people in the community over time including children. It has educated people about commerce, finance, mathematics, culture, and so on. The market space and its activities have played a leading role in influencing most of the children in the community. This is so evident that the research could not ignore the activities of the market and the contributions to their lives.

Even as an artist I was also taken aback about how involved and excited the children were towards creating their art. They would arrive earlier than the scheduled time and even refuse to leave even when I felt we were done. So why chase them away, eventually I even got the most data and learnt relevant contributions from them at those unscheduled moments than even when it seemed like an official art session (interview session). I began to ask questions about why the children were extra enthusiastic about the opportunity for them to create art.

4.3 Art Residency Projects

I conducted art residencies in both Makurdi and Tyowanye. The art residency in Makurdi was in collaboration with Beautiful Minds¹¹; a summer school in Makurdi. While the art residency project in Tyowanye was conducted at Esomchuckwu Standard Nursery and Primary School Tyowanye where the children were also on vacation and attending summer classes. Both art residency projects were conducted very informally in formal school environments.

4.3.0 The Art Residency in Makurdi

I had proposed to use children to create art which I would use as my data for this research. However, when I arrived Makurdi primary schools were on break. It was a bit challenging to see and access groups of children who would create art in the context of class room. I then thought about summer schools and Beautiful Minds became my choice. I met with the proprietress and we discussed about my plans. I explained to her in details the entire scope of my research, the research's questions, aims and my schedule. We immediately agreed to work together and we set up a day. She decided to set out a "special" day where the entire day would be used for visual art. I interviewed the proprietress twice; before and after the art residency. I had asked her several questions about her experience about teaching art over time.

I arranged for some of the art materials we needed for the art projects and arrived early in the morning. I waited for the children to arrive and settle down. I had chats with the children and they soon became very friendly with me. Forty five to fifty (45 to 50) children participated in the art residency project. I took photographs and also filmed the session.

¹¹ Beautiful Minds is a summer school in Makurdi. They run a summer school every summer for school children which include visual art as a subject in their curriculum. We organized a special day for the art residency project.



Plate 8: The children creating art during the art residency project at Beautiful Minds Makurdi.



Plate 9: The children creating art during the art residency project at Beautiful Minds Makurdi.

Angela is the owner of Beautiful Minds. In the first interview she stresses the importance of a summer school. She said it is very important for school children to have a place to study during their vacation from conventional schools. In our discussion I stated that I intended to

organize an art residency project to enable the children create art in a classroom context. She became excited about the project. This is because she believes that summer schools should offer unique programs that even conventional schools do not.

During the art residency project I interviewed three (3) school children, two (2) of which I have presented in the case studies below (Kumawuese and Ushahemba). After the art project I had a chat with Angela and she told me about how she was going to restructure the art classes for her summer school as a result of things she had learnt and experienced from the art residency project. Although the research and art residency was not organized for her to restructure her art curriculum it was interesting how she emphasized the new ideas she had gathered. First she mentioned that she enjoyed the fact that we used almost an entire day for the art project. She also said it would be helpful if she includes the “project day” in her summer school curriculum. Secondly she shared that fact that when we agreed to organize the project she was glad her school children would be excited and learn from the exercise but she had underestimated how much she could learn from the exercise herself.

4.3.1 The Art Residency in Tyowanye

The entire art residency projects in Tyowanye involved fifty to sixty (50 to 60) children who all participated in various ways. I conducted two projects with the children. The first one I asked them to create whatever they wanted with whatever material they chose. The second project was a drawing session; I provided everyone with paper and charcoal and asked them to make art showing who they are. The issue of identity and self-image has always been topical and interesting. While the children created their art I conducted a few interviews with them. These interviews were to enable me get some insight about the children and their background.

The first art project was very open and allowed the children to create all sorts of art with any material. Some of the children also brought some art they had already created in their homes.

The second art project was limited to only drawing. I provided the same kind of paper and charcoal for every participant and also asked them to create art on the same theme: identity. Identity has always been an interesting issue to deal with. I also thought of a theme where by every school child could relate to. It was interesting what the children related their identity to. Some of the works were characterized by figures, random motifs and various forms generally. I had short interviews with about eleven (11) children during in the art projects.

The children created a number of things like guns, cars, balls, hats, machetes, knives, catapults, a boat and several animal figures like crocodile, fish and snake. Generally children are interested in vehicles, weapons, and animals. These three categories are similar because they create movement which is quite interesting to children. To some extent these themes are influenced because of the movies they have watched over time. However, in my interviews with them there is a connotation that the themes could be inspired from their day to day activities. The vehicles could be those they see in and around the market. This influence of the market is inevitable as Terna (one of the children) said his dream is to one day make and

sell art in Tyowanye market. I asked them one of the children why he made a gun and he said there is a need to always protect himself from the enemy. I could relate this to the fact that Tyowanye is prone to crisis. There has been a history of communal crisis with neighbouring communities.

Due to the fact that I cannot analyze all the art created during the art residency I have decided to do random sampling to select a few for presentation in this thesis.



Plate 10: A drawing created at the art residency in Tyowanye art residency project by Ishimadoo Iyua, aged ten (10)



Plate 11: A drawing created at the art residency in Tyowanye art residency project by Paul Shater, aged eleven (11)

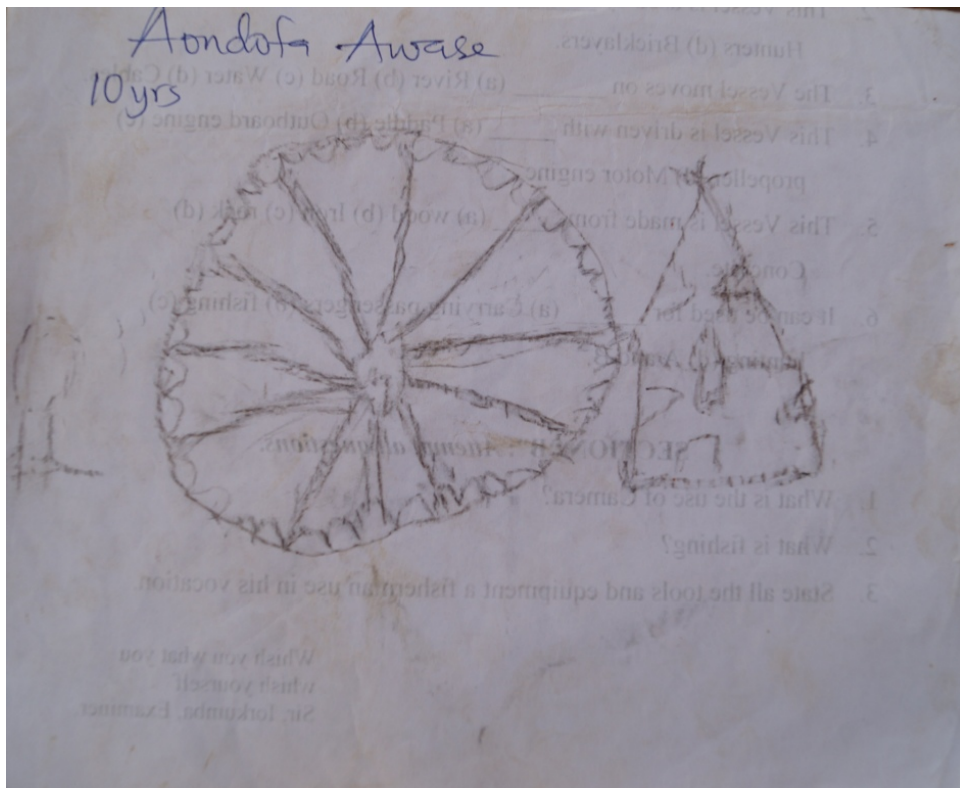


Plate 11: A drawing created at the art residency in Tyowanye art residency project by Aondofa Awase, aged ten (10)



Plate 13: The children playing soccer before the art residency in Tyowanye



Plate 14: The children creating art during the art residency in Tyowanye.



Plate 15: One of the children in Tyowanye showcasing his art work created during the art residency at Tyowanye.



Plate 16: The children drawing with charcoal during the art residency at Tyowanye.

While the drawings were going on I went around and made photographs. I tried as much as possible not to influence the drawing sessions by either assessing their works or giving them tips about how not to make their art¹².

4.4 Narratives for Meaning Making

The attraction of an approach grounded in material culture studies is that nothing is left out; all objects are capable of being appropriated to make meaning (Duncum 2010). Most of the objects and art materials the children use to create art while in the classroom are often not chosen by the children but by their classroom art teacher. In fact most of the art curriculums have been designed for decades with specifications detailing the materials to be used. This is not to argue that specifying art materials in it is wrong, the point only stresses the disadvantage of not allowing the children to make their own choices considering the power and meanings of this objects as it relate to material culture. As a result, the children determined the outcome of the drawings. The mystery was heightened as the teachers and I looked forward to the end result.

The meaning making sessions revealed the fact that the children connect more with the art they make outside of the classroom. They often attempt to meet a certain inner demand which they are not completely able to explain. This inner demand is a feeling most artists try to satisfy all through their life. On the contrary the classroom art were created mostly to answer a certain question posed by a teacher. Most often when children make such art they consciously think of the grades, a thought which unconsciously makes the children begin to think of how to satisfy their classroom art teacher who often times is very specific on what he wants and what he does not.

4.5 Material Used

Materials in art have always played a vital role in analyzing and understanding art. This research constituted data from both rural and urban regions. It is interesting that without trying too hard everyone is bound to express themselves with the most available materials. The two contexts; the rural and urban had very similar ideas of expressions for two and three dimensional forms. Generally the research gathered two kinds of collections; those I asked the children to create and those they created at will (even before the research). They came up with drawings, sculptures, constructions and so on. The general ideas can be classified to be similar however the choice of materials differed.

Drawing: This is one of the easiest ways of self-expression. Without getting ready for art people often just get started with drawing. Most complex art projects also start with simple drawings which are later developed. This is also very similar with children who also find

¹² I consciously and deliberately did not assess the art created by the children during the art projects because that was not the aim of the art residency projects or the entire research.

themselves unconsciously creating marks. Most of the drawings were in pencil, charcoal, crayon, marker, gouache, water color. However, there were a few drawings made on sand.

Sculpture: It is interesting when children take a bold step forward to express themselves in a three dimensional form. Generally drawing and other two dimensional forms of art are easier than sculpting; one would wonder why the children would decide to sculpt when they could easily draw. Most of the sculptures were executed in clay.

Construction: This section houses all the three dimensional art that were not sculpted with clay. These were mostly constructions and assemblage. There has been a push and pull over the proper definition of art and craft in art discourses generally. To a large extent in an African context generally art and craft have really not been differentiated. The children constructed cars, guns, head gears, eye “glasses”, bangles, foot wears, boats, swords and various animal figures.

Other: This is a very interesting and unpredictable collection. I classified some expressions as “other”, these are mostly non tangible in nature. During the research the children also used the camera during which they captured their desired images, and moments in form of film and photographs. They were also performances and interesting body postures all of which they captured. Some were unconscious while most were conscious. I have also stated that this research was limited to tangible art however I must also note that these forms of art were created by the children during the time of the research¹³ which forms a large part of the documentary.

4.6 Case Studies

I conducted about twenty three (23) interviews with both children, parents, teachers and proprietresses. The information gathered from these interviews has been presented in bits throughout this thesis. However, I have selected ten (10) interviews with the children and have presented them below in the form of case studies with pictures. Most of the interviews were filmed. The interview settings involving gadgets created a sophisticated scene which made the children take the sessions very seriously. This is because most of the children both from the rural and urban areas had never been videoed before talking about their art. This also made them feel valuable as the researcher made them know how important their art meant. This also compelled them to see their art making session quite differently; sessions they previously saw as “just play time”.

4.6.0 Kumawuese

Kumawuese is a girl who has been in love with princesses over the years. She lives in Makurdi and attends Beautiful Minds during the summer. She also participated in the art residency project. I noticed how outstanding she was during the art residency project when she kept on drawing princesses as her only theme over and over again. I became curious, during a chat with her mom I learnt that Kumawuese has been in love with princess for years

¹³ These non-tangible forms of art would not be analysed in this research as stated in the introduction in Chapter 1, it is out of the research’s definition of art.

which she depicts with stories to go with it. This confirmed the tales I had gathered from my interactions with her teachers. I set up appointments with her and visited her severally in her home. It was amazing when I found that she did not only draw them but she had created characters from the drawings who “lived” a life. She gave them names, checked on them, provided for them and hoped they lived a good life. The level of attachment she had can hardly be described in words. During an interview I asked her how she created the characters and she told me that they evolved from magazines she had followed over time. She was inspired by pictures of celebrities around the world mostly from western magazines. She will take her time draw them and color them. Drawing characters of very beautiful girls from colorful magazines is what most girls her age would do but hers was different because she would evoke life into them afterwards through her stories and the characters she created. She did the initial drawings on plain A4 papers after which she will mount them on cartons and cut them out neatly. These firm mounts were to enable a long lasting preservation for her works of art which she now sees as characters with a life. She is immediately drawn to beauty, knows exactly the celebrities she wants to replicate but she has little interest in their life in reality. She is more concerned with improving her creative skills and the new life she recreates for them which she enjoys following herself.



Plate 17: Kumawuese drawing a princess in her house in Makurdi after our interview



Plate 18: A painting by Kumawuese showcasing a princess

4.6.1 Kelvin

Samson's story in the bible is one very popular tale for children. It is very interesting to teenagers especially that it concerns strength and dominance. I have heard the Samson story several times but I must say I was captivated when Kelvin narrated his with his drawing. This is because I would have never guessed it right if I was asked to just glance at the drawings. I would have randomly thought of a wrestler out there due to the muscles of the figure. This also confirmed the importance of narratives in trying to understand the works of art the children created. In an interview session in his class, he started his narration and his classmates tried to stop him as though it was not important, they interrupted him and implied "say something more important". I was glad when he ignored them and was persistent in telling his tale. I became even more interested as he told the great story of strength. He titled his work "*Samson the Legend*". The story of Samson can be depicted on a single scene but he decided to depict his in sequence as though it were a comic. He flipped from page to page as he took me through the story. His ability to deliver the tale in detail was more so because he had depicted his art in scenes which created a sequence for his narrations. I asked him why he decided to draw Samson and he said he has always admired Samson's strength and his

long hair and had wished to be that strong when he grew up. Interestingly Kelvin has used very firm lines on his drawing which depicts strength. The Samson figure in Kelvin's drawing portrays lots of angular forms. These angular forms to a large extent connote the fierce person Samson was. Kelvin's multiple drawings did not in any way show Samson's eye balls, during our interview it was not clear whether or not this was deliberate but in the last days of Samson he lost his eyes as stated in the Bible.



Plate 19: A drawing of Samson by Kelvin

In this particular picture in Plate 8 Kelvin depicts Samson from behind. He has decided to shade the entire hair dark which has created a high contrast in the entire drawing. The shaded hair has become very noticeable which indirectly relates to the importance of the hair which was the secret of Samson's strength.



Plate 20: A drawing of Samson showing his rear view by Kelvin

4.6.2 Aondosoo

Aondosoo lives in Makurdi where he attends primary school. He has a lot of passion for drawing. He heard I would be coming over to his place for an interview session and he had sleepless nights. Then I finally arrived and we spoke about his passion and why he did what he did. He was excited to create his art while I filmed him but I also asked him questions about works he had already created in time past (most of his previous art works were his school assignments). We conducted the interview outside and in less than few minutes the scene was crowded, neighbours and friends all stopped by to see their hero express himself, this even gave Aondosoo much more confidence. We talked about art in his school and home; I inquired what prompts his themes and where he wanted to take his art to. He stated that he draws his themes from his day to day activities; he was very affirmative that he would become an artist. In the course of my interview with him it was obvious that he was more excited about the art he created out of class even in the way he narrated the stories behind the art. This to some extent can be likened to the idea of “class influence effect” (as discussed in the later part of this Chapter), as he is free to create whatever he chooses other than answering a question in class.

In this composition he juxtaposed figures of two (2) nurses, a doctor, an ambulance and a building of a hospital. He did not put perspective into consideration since the doctor seems to be larger than the entire composition. In our interview I asked him why he painted this composition and he said: first he loves the idea that doctors and nurses saving lives and secondly he admires medical personnel because they are very neat.

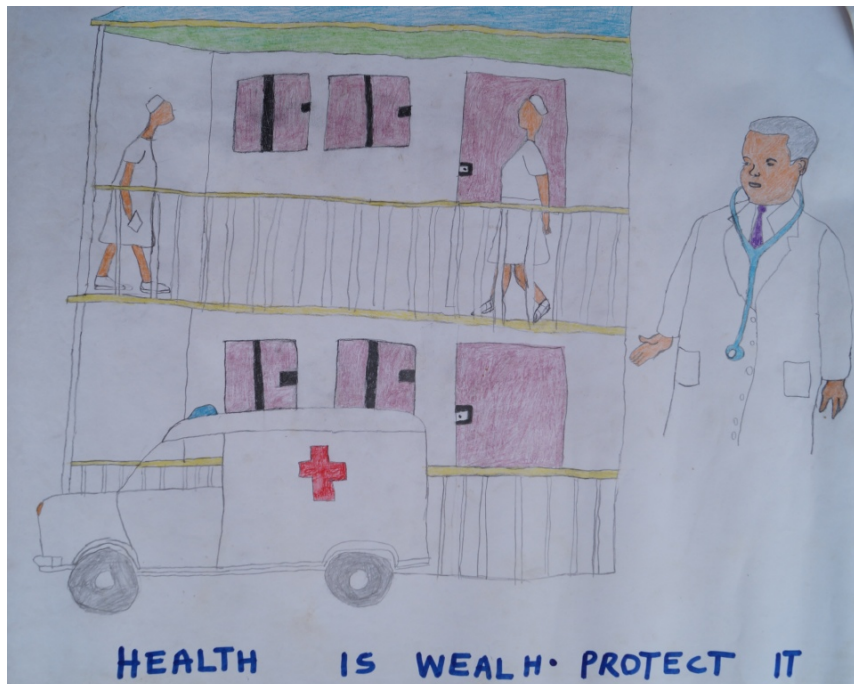


Plate 21: A drawing by Aondosoo

4.6.3 Mem

Mem was born in Makurdi where she lives. She attends Hearts and Minds Makurdi and was in her sixth grade during my interview with her. I interviewed her about a modeling of a house she had done. All I could see was a modeling of a house which was probably a class assignment. I almost did not ask the “why” question but I decided to ask hesitantly, and then the story began. I was expecting to hear “this was just another sticking together of cardboards for a class assignment”. The expected story was that of a fiction but I was astounded how she told it with so much compassion, you could feel her pain. The summary of the story was that a family travelled for a vacation and left behind their house. Unfortunately armed robbers broke in and caused a lot of damage. They also made away with valuables. It is obvious that she told the story over and over again but what could make her keep to the details were the fact that the structure was tangible and the fact that she made the art herself. She had taken her time to recreate the story by modeling the house with details of the structure with horticulture. It is not clear whether or not this structure was exactly the same with the house in reality however she provided some details on the structure which she emphasized in her narration. One would expect that a modeling with details of plants should also have a door. In

her explanation she did not state clearly if she left out the door deliberately. However, a detailed modeling of a house without a door in this context can represent the “break in” in her story. Mem felt sad she could not stop the robbery while the family was away. She also concluded she is consoled because no one was hurt.



Plate 22: A house modeling by Mem

4.6.4 Mne

Mne lives in Makurdi and attends primary school. She is very playful and creative. A friend of mine informed me about Mne and her hopscotch. It sounded interesting so I decided to visit her. I got there in the evening and met Mne and her friends playing together which was their usual routine most evenings. They draw rectangular boxes on the ground which became their play board. The game requires each participant to compete to own as much space as possible. As a part of the game, they sang, jumped, clapped and competed. I observed with great interest as everyone who won a space would draw forms, marks, lines and so on to signify his/her ownership of the space. I was particularly keen about Mne’s spaces as she took her time to consciously do her drawings. During our interview session I asked her why she chose to draw certain motifs and forms. She said because they are pleasing to her. She drew floral forms which looked like flowers. She said she loves drawing flowers because they give her so much joy. She also represented some of her spaces in the game with drawings of princesses and said she had always wished to be a princess. When I asked why she said all princesses are beautiful and intelligent. She drew with her hand, foot and sticks. She makes sure that every space carries a different pattern, saying “because when the game is over then the different patterns together create an interesting art”.



Plate 24: Drawings on sand created by Mne and her friends



Plate 25: Drawings on sand created by Mne

4.6.5 Ushahemba

I met him at Beautiful Minds during the art residency project. He is a bold painter. Figure 26 and 27 are two of her paintings at the residency project. He used very bold brush strokes. In our interview I asked her why she is no longer bold with her art. He told me that even if there are mistakes he would use more paint to correct it by painting over it. This explanation reveals why she can afford to use very bold strokes of saturated colors.

Ushahemba is very bold and energetic which is evident in his brush strokes. During the art residency project he created two paintings with both themes related to strength. One of the paintings depicted two (2) sharks: aquatic species which is a terror to other aqua inhabitants. The second painting showcases a very muscular human figure. I asked him why he chose these particular themes and he said nothing specifically. However Ushahemba loves the idea of acting bossy over his classmates, he assumes the position of authority over his classmates even though they are all peers.



Plate 26: A painting by Ushahemba



Plate 27: A painting of a muscular figure by Ushahemba

4.6.6 Nengen

Nengen is ten (10) years old, he is in his third grade and lives in Makurdi. He is very excited about making cars. He creates cars from discarded materials like tin cans, plastics and cartons. His mother has always complained of how he often turned the house into a mess. Most of his left over junk materials litter everywhere in the compound. I had an interview with him primarily to find out about his inspirations and motives for making his art. It was interesting when he said he is usually inspired by the cars he sees on the street on his way to school. He usually takes his time to recreate the cars, he said it makes him fulfilled when he successfully recreates any car. The cars have become a companion, he would attach a rope to them and drag them everywhere he goes assuming he is “driving” them. He drags them with him with excitement especially when his mother sends him on errands. He further explains that dragging (driving) the car along with him makes the whole errands faster. He used cartons and slippers to make these cars. Aluminum is also another medium he has explored with. Whatever medium he explores with, one common factor is they are functional because he drags (drives) them around for errands. He used thread and glue as a binder to hold the cars together.



Plate 28: Some cars created by Nengen

4.6.7 Mngusonon

Mngusonon is twelve (12) years old and lives in Makurdi. She is very curious when it comes to creativity generally. Mngusonon loves drawing as well but for the sake of variety I decided to rather showcase only her crochets in this analysis. She learnt how to crochet from her elder sisters who does it as a form of business¹⁴. At her age it is interesting how she combines different colours and create very beautiful designs. She makes bags, foot wears and hangers for flower pots. During our interview I asked her what inspires her patterns and choice of colours and she says “nothing really”. She goes further to say it is unexplainable hence she just follows her gut feeling and come with her designs. She makes sure each design is distinct from each other. She does not buy her art materials and she does not make her crochets at will. She works only when there is a demand most of which come from her elder sister.

When there are some left over materials she makes some crochets for herself and her friends who pay her a token. She is usually excited about her little earnings from her art. I asked her what constitutes a good design and she said “a good design is a design with bright colours”.

¹⁴ They crochet in form of shoes and bags for sale.



Plate 29: Some of the crochets created by Mngusonon

4.6.8 Hembadoon

Hembadoon lives in Makurdi and attends Hearts and Minds. She really loves bright colors and this reflects in her art. She likes creating collages of happy faces. I asked her why she said the world is surrounded with too much horror and pain. She went further to say because she is a happy girl she believe that happy faces can heal the world of its pain.

Her collages are mostly made up of beads, buttons, plates and paint. She also uses glue to paste the materials together. In her view faces should be happy and she also believes that paintings should portray it. In our interview she disclosed how she sources most of her art materials from her mother's collections of old jewelry, materials and various accessories. I asked her what inspires her most when she creates art and she said she is pleased when she is able to recreate meaningful art from discarded accessories. She concluded by saying her joy is complete when her mother stares at her paintings and says "My dear this is lovely".



Plate 30: A painted collage of a face by Hembadoon

4.6.9 Suem

Suem is eleven 11, she has great passion for art like “no one” I have met at her age. I heard stories about her from her mother and immediately knew she would be perfect for my research. I instantly scheduled an appointment with her and went over with my camera ready for data collection. Before then Suem walked up to her mother and said she wanted an art mentor; something children of that age would hardly think of. This was one of the reasons the mother ran after me. Coincidentally I had just returned from Tyowanye to Makurdi for research and then I decided to patiently listen to Suem who had more than enough to say. We spent lots of hours talking about works of art from past experience to the collections in her archive. She is one of the few of my interviewees who were very assertive of becoming an artist as a sole choice for career. During other interview sessions the phrase “I will be an artist when I grow” was easy to come by. Suem already considers herself an artist and that all is required of her is to keep up her visual expressions as she grows up. Suem already considers herself an artist and all is required of her is to keep up her visual expressions as she grows up. In our interview I asked her what motivates her and she said it is cartoons. This is quite evident as she had done a lot of “copying” from Disneyworld prints; flowers, animated forms like Mickey, Minnie and the likes. She has a good understanding of color for an eleven (11) year old. Overtime her quest to learn more has greatly influenced her choices for visual expressions in terms of forms, themes, messages and her elaborate use of art terms.



Plate 31: Suem with her art in her mentor's studio

4.7 The Class Effect Influence

A classroom has created the idea that things should be copied and replicated based on proven theories and tested formulas. This might work well in several subjects but it has a lot of limitations when it comes to creative subjects especially visual arts. The idea of replication might be good for a start to give the children a sense of confidence that yes they can also create but eventually it limits their inner creative abilities which should normally have no bounds. This is also because the teacher is presented as the ultimate figure who vets their visual expression. So why would a child think out of the “class” to a new direction other than that which a teacher has shown interest? It is only normal that the child would most likely want to play safe and create within the approved creative ideas of the teacher.

The experience of working with children during this research is great. I was puzzled at results which I would have ordinarily brushed over. The effect of “class effect influence” was a major finding in my research. I put together art residency program where forty to fifty (40 to 50) children were brought together and allowed to create whatever they decided to and the “class effect influence” pattern repeated a number of times. Bringing the children together had a “class effect influence” however I must say there was also a slight difference in organization since I did not assume that “teacher” position which they are used to. Considering my methodology and how the use of PV has made clear the advantage of distancing myself as much as possible even with my presence and participation in the research. The child’s subconscious idea of class still played a central role in their conceptions. It happened severally when children about forty to fifty (40 to 50) would end up with not more than five (5) themes. These were influences from within themselves. This was a bit different when a number of the children were visited individually in their homes to

follow up on what they had been creating. When the general drawing sessions starts most of the children would start steering and looking for approvals. Unfortunately during the residency project it was different from the usual practice as I was not giving any approval by telling which art was right or not as a typical teacher was expected, they in turn got the needed approvals from each other. I also made sure that to a great extent my instructions did not limit any of them because I mostly asked them to “draw whatever they want”. They looked around and decided to reproduce the themes from those who had the confidence to start. The effect was huge since on an average of eight to nine (8 to 9) children were influenced by one child.



Plate 32: Some children in Tyowanye with the researcher

4.8 The Future through Dreams

The “child phase” is a temporal phase which phases away over time, not understanding the child as a phase affects the entire perception and reaction to children. Everyone has assumed that the child would outgrow his problems someday or at worst solve them when he grows up forgetting that when the child eventually becomes an adult then his child phase phases out. Adults procrastinate about issues concerning children. On the other hand, adults especially parents have also tried to solve problems for children without really taking time to understand their world. This in turn complicates the problems. This research did not take any assumptions for granted and dug deep into the world of the Tiv child. It is important to abide by the consent of the child in an attempt to address issues of the child and child related issues.

It is interesting that almost every art analyzed in the course of this research has an element of the future in it. The children have either created a character of themselves which they are very proud of or addressed a situation they dream of. They are quite excited to talk about all these in their narratives. These children feed on fantasies as they anticipate adulthood. The art creations are tangible 'realities' that they hold on to which helps them psychologically to keep hoping for their dreams as they try to move forward.

Dreams come in different forms. It is interesting that we often forget that dreams also come during the day which some refer to as nostalgia. This can be very intense and build up over time one has a long term expectation as a result to her dreams over time. This is very common with children. This subsection was initially intended to address the dreams of the children as young artists especially during the field work. However, as the section proceeded then it dawned on me that not only the children had dreams but the researcher as well. As a researcher I also had sleepless nights just wishing and fantasizing about the outcome of the entire research, thinking through the art sessions, interview, and observations and kept hoping that they all end up as positive as possible. I also anticipated the outcome of the findings and post field writing. It was interesting that the children had their expectations and I had mine.

CHAPTER 5: THE BLIND SIDE OF CLASSROOM ART

5.0 Introduction

This Chapter argues that art taught in classrooms to a large extent deprives the children of freedom for their self-expression as indicated by Bresler's (1998) study. This Chapter is based on my interview with school children (see previous chapter), two (2) school proprietresses (Linda and Angela) and a head master (Teryima). I interviewed them about their experiences on teaching arts to school children. The Chapter discusses a number of points, one of which is the poor art background of those who teach art today to school children in Nigerian class-rooms. In the everyday conversations I had with people, one of the common phrases I heard was 'I used to be an artist'. Almost everyone out there assumes they are "artists" or at least used to be artists and as a result assume they possess the requirements to teach art once they have acquired the general pedagogical qualifications of teaching generally. Teaching and learning art, however, -has its own rules and guidelines and must not be left in the hands of "whomever" (amateurs), especially those that assume to be artists without a formal basic training. In my interview with Linda (an art specialist and the proprietress of Hearts and Minds Makurdi) she said this has become a major challenge and as a result she has decided not to leave the teaching of art in the hands of those who have no art background.

The second point made in this Chapter concerns the school curriculum. The art curriculum has often been designed without the proper input of art educationists who are the specialists; this as a result has affected even the time allocated for the children to create art. Fine art as a subject should not be handled just like any other subject. Self-expression consumes time and unfortunately most art classes are conducted in a rush. Lack of adequate time has been a great constraining factor on the processes of art classes for children. It is quite disheartening that the school authorities do not recognize the fact that these art classes are rushed. During these constrained art classes emphases are rather placed on the fact that the art created 'must' be finished. In as much as every child should be encouraged to finish his/her art, I also want to state that this must not be in a single class session because the time allocated for a class is usually constrained. This discourse does not intend to encourage unfinished art during art classes. However it argues that emphases should rather be placed on the genuineness of the expressions in the art by the school children. And lastly classroom logistics has also become a factor. Most classrooms do not have adequate space for all the children to freely move around while they create art. Working in a tight compact room psychologically clusters one's ideas.

This chapter will also deal with classroom and non-classroom art. These two terms are properly defined in the section below.

5:1 Classroom Arts and Non Classroom Arts

This section deals extensively with the term classroom arts and non-classroom arts. This introduction attempts to define in very simple terms what they both mean. For the purpose of this discourse classroom art refers to the art created by the children in a formal school setup

with a supervision of a teacher. While non-classroom art is the art created by the children at will in a non-school setting with no supervision. First and foremost let us try to understand art used in schools from Bresler's study. His observations revealed three genres of arts used in the schools: (1) "child art," meaning original compositions created by children in dance, drama, visual art, and music; (2) "fine art," meaning classical works in the different arts media created by established artists; (3) "art for children," meaning art created by adults specifically for children, often for dialectic purposes, this is as proposed by Bresler (1998). During my ethnographic research among the Tiv children in schools and communities, I studied both classroom art and non classroom art and made certain observations upon which I as presented in this Chapter.

5:2 A Mixed Up Context

School art is typically distinguished by the subject matter it notes: visual art, music, dance, or drama. In this article, I suggest a new distinction among the arts genres used in the school, namely, "child art," "fine art," and "art for children." Rather than being categorized by subject matter, these three genres operate across the various media. Each genre is associated with different contents, pedagogies, and evaluation practices. Each is based on a separate set of ideologies and goals, related to different underlying assumptions about the nature of arts and arts learning. Those assumptions are incompatible level (what constitute art) and the pedagogical level (how to teach it) (Bresler, 1998).

Art genres such as visual art, music, dance, poetry and drama are very distinct and too broad to be taught as a single subject. For instance there is so much difference between visual and performance art in reality. It is ideal that children be made to understand the huge differences between these art practices at an early age, one way is that they should be taught as different school subjects and possibly taught by different teachers. To a large extent most children lose interest in studying or at least exploring arts professionally early in their lives due to the fact that the distinction in these art genres are not properly spelt out. This is because these art genres are often taught under an umbrella term (subject) labeled art. Every genre of art has its own uniqueness and is best understood and enjoyed if it is properly broken down and not generalized. It is important to teach the children about all the diverse genres of art but it is also important to make them understand how distinct they and their various roles are. It would also be proper to point to them that even in the professional world today there are hardly anyone practicing all the diverse genres professionally.

Time and space play a very important role in the entire success of an art production. Most art classes are conducted in a confined space under a constrained time. In the day to day running of a school curriculum and time table, there are scheduled periods for every subject to be taught. Bresler (2008) also noted "I examine the contexts of time and space for arts instruction, as well as the communities of practice in which school art functions. I show that each of the components plays a different, though interrelated, role in the dilution of the three genres of school art". The periods for art classes are also the same; these periods are often about thirty minutes or a little more. This idea of a constrained time creates a notion of "start and finish" for the children.

Time allocated for classes often determines the outcome of the art created. The art residency project I conducted at Beautiful minds lasted five (5) hours. This gave the school children enough time to properly express themselves through various art mediums. After the program the proprietress Angela said in our interview there was a great difference in how the children carefully created art as compared to the usual art lessons which are usually constrained. Ideally conventional art has been practiced in a studio. Art studios are quite different from conventional school classrooms. This involves the entire structure and the general arrangements like the furniture which often congests the school children's work space. Creating art in a conventional class room in schools where there are desks, chairs and tables arranged for approximately thirty students (to basically sit and write) is most likely not the most appropriate place to create art. This is also reflected in Figures 8 and 9, where the school children of Beautiful Minds were clustered around tables leaving little or space in front of them to work freely. The arrangements also limited their easy moving around.

5:3 Child Arts

One of the main arguments of this Chapter is based on those who teach arts. During my ethnographic research among the Tiv children in schools and communities, I observed that most of the art instructors were either not trained or had a little practice of art as far back as their secondary school education; which is approximately over ten years ago for most of them. This was observed in the seven (7) schools I visited. Most of the teachers assumed they are knowledgeable and capable of teaching the children. During this study I observed art classes taught by six (6) classroom art teachers and two (2) specialists. I attended their classes at random and also interviewed them about their experiences and opinions. Generally during art teaching sessions instructions come in two forms: one taught by arts specialists, the other by general classroom teachers. When taught by arts specialists, content often focused on elements of art (color, shapes, lines, level, plot). When taught by classroom teachers, content revolved around themes of holidays, seasons, and special events (Easter bunnies, winter penguins, Valentine cards). These themes also suggest the diverse mindset of the two kinds of instructors. The specialists obviously focused on the elements of art and design. Their teachings usually results in teaching the children how to use the principles of design to apply the elements. These insights usually enable the children to apply these elements in diverse ways and continually continue to explore them. Class room teachers on the other hand focus on mostly events and mostly just sound very vague during the art classes which do not usually help the children for the long run.

Bresler (1998) notes that, in general, child arts consisted of quick products, completed within one thirty-minute lesson. Classroom teachers used a "one-shot" lesson, whereas art specialists thought sequentially, building from one lesson to another, and aimed at developing concepts and skills. Arts specialists focused on arts vocabulary and techniques, establishing frame works for arts activities. They provided guidance and modeling yet allowed students' choices. The difference in concepts and methodology in teaching by these various set of instructors has a huge role in the influence and impact on the children. I attended an art class at Hearts and Minds taught by Linda. It was a still life drawing class. She arranged some objects for the

school children to draw. Even though the class was a new project for the children, there were some other art projects placed behind the class which was still ongoing and the children worked on it from time to time. Most of the classroom teachers who were not art specialists were more concerned with teaching a topic as a lesson, which is a single duty to be accomplished rather than the processional progression of the child over time. These lessons often end up as isolated single ideas for the children.

Art specialists on the other hand created frame-works by asking probing questions and making suggestions grounded in artistic rationale. Classroom teachers tended to be more perspective in all subjects, but in some cases they adopted a non-interventionist approach, providing little or no guidance. Accordingly, their activities ranged from the tightly structured production of holiday items and basic dance movements, to free creation, for which teachers provided visual materials or music as background to dance and offered no direction. Both classroom teachers and specialists used ample encouragement, the former in a generic way (“I like it”), the latter specially (“I like the way you use color to make your pattern stand out”) Bresler (1998). These remarks from the different kinds of instructors shows the various levels of attachment the instructors have on the children and their works. The classroom teacher’s generic way of encouraging the children also exemplifies their expectations. To a large extent, the child might not be expected to create beyond just an “art”. Anything created within the stipulated time is fine and acceptable by the classroom teacher. On the contrary the specialist’s specially detailed encouragement (as noted in the quote earlier) explains how detailed their instructions could be. Their detailed remarks also suggest a more refined expectation from the children. This can be related to the issue of quantity over quality.

Most schools do not have art specialists and do not see the need to employ their services. Most of such schools have taken visual art for granted. I visited a secondary school in Makurdi. I want to keep the identity of the school anonymous¹⁵ in this discussion. I got to the school and spoke to the head master about visual art in the school. I requested to interview the teacher in charge and he directed me to a particular lady. I approached her and she said she was not an art teacher. I spent a couple of time going from the head master to different teachers. I spent about two (2) hours in the school premises and unfortunately I could not speak to one classroom art teacher. I thought to myself if the head master could not identify his art teachers then how serious are they about teaching art.

Generally most of the art collected as data for this research reflected few themes of personal relevance, few indications of exploration of ideas, moods, or feelings. Thus, child art, with its lack of personal expression, resembled children’s activities in other subjects-such as science, math, and social studies. This is because often times the children see art as any other class subject and fail to personalize their ideas and creations. Which should really not be the case considering the nature of arts and how art is self expressively oriented. It is not surprising if the school create art without any personal attachment to them when they find themselves in school environments where the school authorities cannot identify who their art teachers are.

¹⁵ This is for the sake of the school’s image considering my experience with them was negative.

It is intriguing that relative uniformity of style could be discerned even in the classes of those classroom teachers who adopted an open-ended teaching style. There, some students did create artwork that was original and different, but most students produced artwork similar to that made in the highly prescribed classes. I noticed exceptions when the topic *demand*ed personal interpretation (in contrast to merely assigning an open-ended activity, and when children could interpret the topic easily- for example, in the kindergartener's assignment to draw a picture of themselves doing their favorite thing. Students' work, then, reflected a variety of ideas, experiences, and levels of sophistication, manifesting ownership and investment Bresler 1998). During the art residency project at Tyowanye I also observed the children were more involved in an art and its processes when they were asked to create art that dealt with their personal lives they were excited to create art they were a part of. In other to deal with the issue of identity, I specifically asked them to create on paper who they think they are. The outcome was not only personal but also quite diverse.

My experience confirms Bresler's remark (1998) that expression and interpretation, as Langer pointed out four decades ago, are complex processes, involving more than the permission for spontaneous creativity. Expression requires knowledge about feeling as well as sophisticated knowledge of intellectual, technical, and formal skills. When this has been consciously put together then it improves the outcome of the art produced. The exercise of art interpretation creates a consciousness during subsequent art creation session of how art should be made from a conscious application of intellectual, technical and formal skills. Without knowledge and personal investment, self-expression can become trivial, in Langer's words, "symptomatic rather than artistic". Therein lies part of the discrepancy among the ideals of child art as a means for self-expression found in the operational curriculum. Even though self-expression found is celebrated as an important part of the self-fulfilling life and is a central goal of the ideal curriculum in early childhood, observations of the operational arts curriculum indicated few invitations to communicate one's feelings through artistic means.

On the contrary, there is an absolute freedom for those who express themselves outside of a classroom in which ever form. A great illustration is the story of Garner. The British writer Alan Garner, who claims to have been saved from an education "by being too ill to go to school... spinal and cerebral meningitis at the same time, diphtheria, pleurisy and pneumonia", spent six years "alone, looking at a wall." These two elements – having first been deprived of a conventional primary schooling, and the fact that he was ill, "thrown in on" himself, - Garner sees as a common denominator among writers for children. He says that he was lucky to have lived in a room where the walls were lumpy, as he says "there were landscapes on those walls" (Wintle and Fisher, 1974, p223). Even though Garner's story could be considered to be on the extreme considering his health issues however it is a very symbolic discussion related to art outside of the classroom. Garner created a new world within himself with just what he had. Even in a four cornered wall he still "created" landscapes in his subconscious. He really appreciates the will and unlimited freedom he had especially when he imagines the restrictions classroom teachers often create. There is also a possibility that the instructions from classrooms teachers would have eventually limited him considering his health challenges. Cooping in a conventional classroom would have been

difficult. Today Garner has contributed immensely to child arts but said he got everything “right” during his lone moments. There are a handful of classroom art teachers out there who might have not seen any need to give him a pass mark while he was developing himself. In my conversation with the head master of the anonymous school described above it was clear art as a school subject was not taken seriously. If a secondary school do not appoint a particular teacher a specific role of teaching the children art then how can the children’s progress be monitored? To a large extent most of the children interested in art in such an environment are deprived opportunities to explore.

5:4 Fine Art as a Teaching Tool

Fine art in itself is a teaching tool which is a great drive for teaching children art. Less systematically present than child art, fine art existed in schools in teachers’ presentation of the works of the great masters through for example, listening to classical music of well-known composers, or looking at reproductions, posters, and postcards of works by famous artists. Typically, fine arts activities were the territory of arts specialists. Several classroom teachers used visual work only as class decorations except for a few exceptions. Introducing fine arts in art classes is a great way to improve the works of the children. In fact most artists today can trace back to the moments when they were inspired by certain works of art, they often remember the place and person who exposed them to such works. Most specialists use works of master artists along with the tales behind those art works to inspire the children. Classroom art teachers get hold of this same works and instead decorate the walls of the classroom. So in reality the works of art which would have served as inspirations just lay bare on walls. This is another opportunity unutilized mostly because these art teachers lack the kind of inspirational experiences art specialists had with the fine art of renowned artists at some point in their life. However this section also discusses how best fine art can be used to teach children art in the classroom other than just displaying it to them as I observed during the art classes with the school children.

Fine art taught to children can only become a success when the subject is not taught traditionally as any other subject where the facts are just poured out to the children. This could be more interesting if an attempt is made to connect the facts to the meaning of the art. Students’ low interest in historical perspective may have been related to the fact that school based fine arts focused on facts and information, with little emphasis on elicitation and engaging them in meaning making. The lack of interpretation and construction of meaning in fine art paralleled the lack of interpretations in the child-art activities. This makes the children to equate their art with their everyday activities which as usual is not also taken seriously. Thus, fine arts were used for exposure, sometimes for the creation of ambience, not unlike the role of music in grocery stores and elevators, or visual art in hotels. The lack of focus on aesthetics as a framework for discussion about the meaning of art can be explained by the fact that it is dependent on critical reflection, which was not part of school discourse, whereas art history can be introduced in a technical manner, using facts, thus making it compactable with other school style discourse. One of the essences of art is to be enjoyed however the use of fine arts in schools should go beyond that. Eventually when arts history is

not introduced in a technical manner by including elicitation and interpretations then there is no difference of the use of fine arts in classrooms, hotels, to children and their improvement.

For example when paintings of Van Gogh are presented to the children, it would be interesting to summarize his life and times. His “moody” life with loads of down times can also help the children understand the brush strokes in his painting and in fact why the paintings also portrayed diverse colour moods in the brush strokes. Rather than teach the story of Van Gogh as history (art history), which is often boring to the children. It could be more useful for instance to remind the children that Van Gogh hardly made sales while he was alive however he still continued to paint. This emphasizes the fact that art is not all about money but again today Van Gogh is one of the most priced artists of all times which proves that indeed hard work pays. Suem was one of my interviewed children during this research. My interview with her is presented as one of case studies in Chapter 4. Suem is inspired by Mickey and Minnie mouse. She draws and paints the characters in different versions. During my conversation with her it became clear that she does not know about Disney Wonderland. It could be quite inspiring for Suem if for instance the facts and wonderful stories of Disney World are taught to her to accomplish the images of Mickey and Minnie mouse she really adores. These stories would not only make the characters more enjoyable but she would also interpret them better.

I noted the general low priority for interpretation, meaning making, and aesthetics in all genres of arts used in the schools. When children are asked to create art without encouraging them to ponder over them or at least try to interpret them they never associate their art with meaning carrying creations (Bresler 1998). Bresler notes that a related issue examined in these three genres of art concerns the types of *knowledge* that are cultivated in the operational curriculum of them. To what extent do we discern the knowledge and ways of thinking of the artist, the maker, concentrating on “how to” (e.g. “what happens if I do this?” “How is this artist’s ideas and problem solving relevant to my own work?”)? To what extent do we discern the knowledge of the art critic, the *perceiver*, interacting with artwork, concentrating on noticing and understanding (e.g. “What does this artwork say to me?” “What are the formal, technical, and expressive qualities in this work?”)? Clearly, the stances of the maker and the perceiver are interrelated. Even for children a complete aesthetic package is to combine creation and appreciation. School curriculums must create a room for art appreciation to be discussed. These discussions would emphasize the children’s inspirations, themes, methodologies, and even choices of materials used. Research suggests that even preschoolers can ensure the stances of producer and perceiver, artistic development occurs as a result of children’s ability to juggle their activities as creators and viewers. Indeed, children’s early representational drawings often emerge as a result of a dialogue between production and perception.

During my visits to the schools I observed that school children rarely initiated discussions and asked questions during and after their art classes. Most instructors assume a dominant role so children mostly take a “back seat” and remain in the background during discussions even when they create and own the works in question. With the absence of inquiry, reflection,

and interpretation by the children, art (mostly in visual arts and music) becomes diluted and its power lost.

The power of the arts to serve expressive and intellectual ends, facilitate new understanding, redraft vision, and help develop children's interpretive skills which is strongly affected by the general school practices and culture. The general school practices and culture tends to treat art as any other school subject. Art in schools should go beyond the idea of mere "pass or fail" which is the mere yardstick for assessing and grading students in almost every other subject. The potential of art to inform children's lives and trigger in them deep experiences is diminished. The goals of classroom art seem to be far more attentive to mainstream educational norms than they are to artistic concerns. Like many school disciplines, school art is narrowed down within school boundaries, and consequently, its potential for evoking powerful emotions is diminished. One way this can be achieved is through focusing on technical matters-concepts and skills rather than holistic, social, political, or expressive concerns. It is very important that school art is taught in schools with lots of emphasis placed on the fact that only little can be achieved in the classroom. This emphasis would further encourage the children to explore art beyond the boundaries of school classroom walls. These explorations out of the classroom can become quite enormous as far as the children are able to associate their art and explorations with certain meanings in their life. This Chapter encourages school authorities to make it mandatory for classroom art teachers to urge children to create art in their homes. This is because to a great extent classroom teachers have a great deal of psychological and physical influence on school children. This is because children hold their teacher's views in high esteem. Eventually classroom teachers just play safe which is at the expense of evoking an inner expression in the school children.

5:5 "School Classroom Art" Misplaced

The meaning of any kind of art is inseparable from the conditions under which it is created and experienced. The fine arts, for example, are historically linked to religion and spirituality, nationalism and patriotic values. They evolved in awe-inspiring churches, and luxurious courts, thrived in concert halls and museums. We attribute art and artists with degrees of intensity, passion, vision, intellect, and single-mindedness beyond the scope of the ordinary individual. The training of artists is strict, and talent is essential, as is the mastery of technique, the ability to think in and communicate through the medium, the knowledge of the art form's terminology, and an appreciation of its development. We speak of art as timeless and transcendental. At the same time, we note art's service as a commodity. This connotes some mix understandings and portrayal of art generally. In an attempt to define art we portray art as something very deep, we link it to spirituality, patriotic values, and history and so on. At the same time we treat the same art afterwards as mere objects and crafts which is quite difficult to comprehend.

"Most principals and administrators said the arts were there primarily to comply with union requirements of release time for classroom teachers" (Bresler, 1992). It is quite unfortunate that we preach of art as very deep and sound at the same time it is not taken seriously. Art as

a subject is often seen as a way to help the children express themselves and a session that would complement the other school subjects. However it is quite unfortunate that those in charge of the educational authorities who should foster the cause of the importance of art in classrooms are comfortable with ideas like including art in school curriculum as a mere fulfillment of the union's requirements. If art is included in curriculums as "release class" for teachers then it is almost certain that teaching the art itself will not be taken seriously. A clear example is the end of school year. A time when parents and the entire school come together and interestingly the children's art decorations stand out. A time when most schools try to present children's art as professional as possible. The schools look great, the teachers feel good and the children feel like professionals at least for a short while. I visited Shepherd Academy Makurdi towards the end of their academic term. The school children had rounded up their exams and were rehearsing for a dance and drama to be presented on their graduation day. It is unfortunate that often times these school children put in a lot of efforts in dance, drama, visual art all of which is presented on the last day just for the show and nothing more. This is a vital note that schools come together during art activities. It is clear how interesting art is even to non-artists. People's interest in these school activities have painted a picture of how essential the creations of these children are, however most of these end of year decorations are created by children who do not know the importance of the art they produce. End of year school decorations are very important in their own right however they are just a fragment of what the art these children create stand for or can be used for. The glamorous end of school year day ends and the art works also end up in the trash bins, very sad.

5:6 Role and Structures for Arts Specialists

Generally visual arts as taught by classroom teachers can be attributed to teachers' lack of knowledge and expertise in the subject matter, lack of aesthetic awareness, and lack of skills in producing and analyzing art. This is as simple as expecting someone to give what he does not have. Most of the school teachers who try to teach art might be on the wrong path considering their lack of knowledge however the few willing to do not have what it takes. I have to specially make this note: that during this research I met very hard working and extremely committed classroom art teachers who teach art and intend to give the children the best unfortunately they do not have the capabilities due to their inadequate art backgrounds. Teaching children art in school requires a certain kind of expertise which in most cases only the art specialists have. I believe that the roles of specialists and the structures in which they operate are central to the understanding of school art. Art teachers represent a distinctive subculture within the school, with special meaning to themselves as insiders. Art teachers are typically seen by children (as well as by other teachers and administrators) as offering relief from the rigor of academics. Logically, seeing art as relief from other school subjects should be a merit in itself if used properly. Perceiving art as a relief from other subjects exhibits clearly the kind of nature art as a subject is. Art as a school subject is in fact a "relief"; an elevated platform in a sculptural sense from other subjects if the essence is properly utilized and the children are meant to understand that it is a forum where they can express themselves

as free as possible as opposed to other subjects which might be more rigid. The irony is art classes are not used as a “relief” but rather a time for release periods.

The spaces allocated to classroom art teachers and arts specialists can also suggest the kind of importance school authorities place on classroom arts. One’s room is a highly significant possession in school terms, symbolizing professionalism, autonomy, and control. Bresler (1998) observed that “It is indicative of the range of art within the culture of schools with no rooms for art teachers. That constituted a marked difference not just from regular classrooms but also from other spaces-libraries, gyms, and offices for social workers and counselors. Those arts teachers that did have rooms of their own often operate in a space that is not meant to be for art but houses computers and other school “stuff.” To a large extent most schools have not provided proper offices for their art instructors which is not the case with those teaching other subjects most times. There might be several reasons for these lapses, one of which could be that most of these instructors are not full time staff. Ideally art should be learnt and practiced in the studios and not in conventional classrooms. And hence most schools have not been planned with such structures which include art studios it would have been great if at least decent alternatives are created; spaces that can house art materials and art works produced (or those still undergoing production) by the children, teachers and art specialists.

5:7 Time

The time used for producing art is as important as the time one takes to prepare. This sometimes involves getting logistics in place. As an artist sometimes it takes quite some time to get into the mood of creating art. This process of trying to get into the right mood can vary greatly from one person to another. It could be a bit traumatic when a fixed time is meant for completing a particular art. This can create a feeling of compulsion. If having a fixed time could be a disadvantage then having a limited time could even be a bigger disadvantage.

“Arts instruction typically took place within a weekly, narrow thirty-minute slot. In music and dance/drama, where the activities- singing songs, doing movement exercises- consisted of several short “units,” that did not seem to pose a problem for arts specialists. But in visual arts, which required sustained time for reflection and experimentation with materials, a thirty-minute slot was highly constraining...In most classrooms, visual arts teachers had time to give a short introduction of an art skill (about twelve minute), conduct a brief practice session (about fifteen minute), and after an extremely brief evaluation of the experience (often a minute or less). Because of limited time, interpretation, expression, appreciation and discussion were marginalized” (Bresler, 1998).

A thirty to forty five (30 to 45) minute slot (which is usually the average time for class sessions in primary and secondary schools) is quite short for an art production/class especially when the children have to start a new project entirely. These listed areas above; interpretation, expression, appreciation and discussion all of which are marginalized are most of which collectively make up a complete “aesthetic experience” in one’s life.

Limited time constraints affects even the projects selected for inclusion in school curriculums. This leaves room on the curriculum for projects that the children can quickly finish. Although most art teachers acknowledged that primary-grade students need to experiment with paint and color, they are not always able to clean everything up well. This expresses the fact that there are certain ideas and concepts that the children could be deprived of just because it cannot be taught within the stipulated thirty to forty five (30 to 45) minute class. Considering that within these same few minutes the children would need to prepare for the class, set up as well and clean up after the class. These avoidable miscalculations continually deprive children of learning several art concepts in classrooms only if school authorities can reverse the idea that a project must be finished within a single class. Consequently, to fit with the tight schedule, specialists focused on drawing, using crayons and construction paper, or on cutting and pasting, avoiding painting and other messy art techniques. With the tight schedule, it is obviously very smart to stick to very simple drawing and coloring techniques however this Chapter is concerned with those important but messier materials and techniques which the children miss out on. These bits and pieces the children miss out on here and there collectively constitute a large pool of knowledge that the children may never get the exposure of experimenting with again. In my interview with Angela she acknowledged the fact that we used about five (5) hours for the art residency there was a great difference in the choices and outcome of the art created by the school children. She said the extensive hours for the art project exemplified how limiting a thirty to forty five (30 to 45) minutes slot for an art class can be.

Arts specialists know the importance of “art conversations” with school children; however this is hardly possible due to lack of time. Evaluations unfortunately regarded as a criticism of a child, rather than a facilitator of teaching, serving to expand students’ skills and sensitivities. Limited time makes it difficult for art conversations to take place between and teachers considering criticism should be done systematically and overtime. Criticizing art created by school children should not be rushed. It is not very convenient for an entire class of about twenty five (25) students to create art and objectively hold conversations about the art between teachers and children in a thirty to forty five (30 to 45) minutes session. Criticism in itself is not wrong especially when it is a constructive criticism. However most people in the place of criticizing children (parents inclusive) do it wrongly and hence the children misunderstand it and assume their entire efforts are condemned. Teryima, one of the head master interviewed said “students’ self-esteem is tied to criticism”. During art evaluation, since the primary aim is not to highlight the wrongs of the children it might be best to first start with the strength of the work then state their shortcomings but follow it up immediately with your expectations and maybe with a methodology on how the expectations can be achieved. Most of these acute criticisms which are eventually perceived as negative energy by the children are not usually experienced by the children when they create art outside the classroom as most times such art is not assessed or coordinated by other people or their teachers. Discussing the works of children is a great way to encourage them to create more art. The time used for discussion is a time which often time prompts the children to create more time to make more art.

5:7 The blind side and the “class influence effect”

The classroom has created an enabling environment for school children to learn. Over time school children’s progress can be traced to their experiences in the classroom. This research included art produced by children in the classroom and elsewhere. In the course of spending time with the children while they created their art in the classroom and during the art residency project I observed some limitations the classroom has on the children. The previous sections in this Chapter has highlighted some limitations of learning art in the classroom to be limited time, lack of adequate working space and classroom teachers with no art backgrounds. All of this end up putting more pressure on the school children. So eventually a school child is put in a confined space, with a limited time, and is supervised by a teacher with little or no art background. When the children find themselves in this situation it becomes very difficult for them so they find an easy way out. Most times the easy way is to quickly draw or create art exactly what the teacher wants. In most cases classroom art teachers dictate to the children what “good” art is and what they should not do. The children often follow these instructions and create art without really thinking for themselves. This is what I refer to as “class influence effect”. Eventually the art they create is often influenced by either their classroom art teacher or other children. During the art residency projects I did not dictate to the children whether or not their art was “correct”. They stared around, after a few had started most of the others took a queue from them and recreated very similar art. The “blind side” is quite alarming because I observed that an average of fifty (50) children would create art with just about five to six (5 to 6) themes.



Plate 33: Five (5) drawings by school children in Tyowanye showing similar themes

Plate 33 showcases five (5) drawings made by five (5) different children with very similar themes. During the art residency I asked the children to make drawings showing their individual selves. However these five drawings still show very similar themes. All the five (5) drawings showcase at least a house while two of the drawings showcase a car (alongside a house). The “class influence effect” has a great impact on the children because instead of creating art from their thoughts, imaginations and experiences they choose to create art from ideas suggested by their classroom teachers or recreate those created by their fellow classmates. At the end of a class the children have works of art to show but in reality they have not expressed their personal self.

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

As a researcher one is expected to be as fair-minded as possible but as usual the human nature in me “indulged” certain expectations which may be biased. At the same time, I am pleased to mention that many unexpected experiences and discoveries derived from this research. This research was peculiar because it concerned children’s art in Africa from the point of view of participant observation and participatory video. Secondly it was interesting that conventional research methodologies had to be applied with either a twist or some special considerations, and thirdly the fact that I was interested in visual art expressions because I am an artist. I also want to mention that I embarked on this research initially to study Tiv child arts in relation to child rights. However rather than look into their art expressions as it relates to their suppressed rights, I decided to be more open and rather study their art as it concerns their life and the actual reasons why they do what they do. Due to my personal experiences (over time among African communities), conducting a research about Tiv children deprived of their self-expression was a challenging idea and even sound positive from an academia point of view. However, I later realized that a number of assumptions should be discussed.

My ethnographic research with the Tiv children in schools and communities lasted for about eight months in total. I primarily collected empirical data mostly from children from both the rural and urban areas whom I lived among. The main aim was to analyze their art as it relates to their everyday lives. The entire research was an attempt to answer this main question: What are the meanings of Tiv child art in the life of Tiv children? Before this was considered however, there was a need to first of all check whether or not their visual art expressions even have an importance. To a large extent the art created by the children have some degree of importance considering that they have meanings as narrated by the children themselves during our interactive sessions. The sub questions in this research played an important role in delving deeper to conclusively relate the meanings of their art to their lives.

The sub questions were:

- How does child art increase the child’s self expression?
- What motivates Tiv children in the production of art?
- How can art produced by Tiv children be understood and interpreted?

Considering the entire findings of the research, I can now say these questions are practically interwoven and have contributed greatly towards the success of the data collection and analysis. The first sub question ensured the meanings of the art should be spelt out to encourage children to continue making art. A large part of this thesis has stressed the fact that children’s art is important exactly because these children incorporate their everyday living, expectations, dreams and aspirations in their art. The central consequence is that these children’s thoughts and expectations can also be read and documented through the art they produced when they are encouraged to create art regularly.

When I look back at the findings and my engagements during the research then some aspects are quite surprising. Interestingly these same aspects I never planned for played a very

important role in the research as well as the entire body of the research. The second sub question is in practical terms the interpretation of the first (sub question). They actually create art as a response from an inner urge for whatever reason it is. Even when the children tell you their art has “no meaning¹⁶” then that in itself is the meaning (maybe temporary). As shown in Chapter 4, Tiv children generally create art as an attempt to express their life’s expectations, disappointments, dreams, intentions and sometimes an outpour of creativity. The third sub question deals with how the Tiv child art can be understood and interpreted. This is based on the responses from the children during the interviews with them hence they are the artist. In addition, because I am an artist I also used general elements and principles of design in analyzing their art; however that was more for the applied meanings of their visual art.

The thesis also compared teaching and learning art in and out of the classroom. I strongly argue that learning art in conventional school classroom is quite limiting. The discourse is not an attempt to condemn classroom art. It is rather an attempt to highlight the shortcomings of learning art in a classroom which my Chapter 5 terms as “the blind side”. Prior to the research the idea of comparing learning art in a classroom and out of the classroom did not seem important. However during the research I noted that due to the varying effect which was quite obvious they should be compared.

In the course of this research I was puzzled at valuable results from research methodologies which I would have ordinarily ignored. The “class influence effect” was a major finding in the research (see Chapter 5). During the research I put together art residency projects where about forty to fifty (40 to 50) children were put together at two (2) different locations (Makurdi and Tyowanye) and allowed to create whatever they decided to. Bringing the children together even in an informal setting had a serious “class influence effect”, however I must say there was also a slight difference in organization since I did not assume the “teacher” position, assessing their art, which they are used to. Considering one of the methodologies, participatory video clearly highlighted the advantage of distancing myself and not interfering in their art creations. Initially the children’s subconscious idea of class and teacher still played a central role in their approach to create their art. It happened severally when children numbering forty to fifty (40 to 50) would end up with about only five (5) themes. However when they were visited individually in their homes to follow up on what they had been creating overtime it was clear that the themes were different, there were a bit more diverse, adventurous and more personal. During the art residency projects when the drawing session would start most of the children would start steering and looking around for approvals; from an “instructor” or themselves. The sessions during the art residency projects were quite different as I was not giving any approval by telling which art was right or not as a typical (classroom) teacher was expected to. They in turn got the needed approvals from each other (from those who seemed most confident about their art). The ‘instructions’ to a large extent never limited any of them as I would say “draw whatever you choose to”. The majority of the children would usually look around and decide to reproduce the themes from those

¹⁶ For most children even when they say their art has no meaning it is either 1. They are shy and/or scared of criticism or 2. They have problems with communicating what they have expressed as the art.

who had the confidence to start. The effect in terms of influence was huge because eventually about forty to fifty (40 to 50) students would work on only five to six themes. This in turn means that at least an average of eight to nine children were influenced by one person.

This research also includes a 30 minute documentary. The documentary is a summary of the entire research experience, highlighting mostly the experiences of the children during the various residency art projects. A large part of the documentary is made up of the shooting done from the participatory video method I employed during the research.

6.1 Lines with Reasons

This entire ethnographic research among Tiv children in schools and communities was an attempt to find the meanings and importance behind their visual art. The thesis analyzed ten (10) interviews with children and presented it in this thesis as case studies. I also presented two (2) interviews with proprietresses and one (1) with a headmaster. The discussions also included works created by children individually and as a group. The research attempted to read meaning in the art created as well as the art “not created”; for example when the children were hesitant in creating art. This meant I had to also read into the different environments and attempt to find out why they responded differently at certain places and times.

After listening to the children and spending some time with them it was no longer a question of whether or not their art had meanings but what the meanings were. The main research findings are revolved around the children’s “lines with reasons”. The actual reasons why they decided to render their expressions in the forms which they did. It is also important to note that the initial intention of the research was mainly to assess the importance of the children’s art to their day to day life however the research also considered their learning modes and or models.

6.2 Further Study

Child art is based on an understanding of children’s development as well as the ability to guide them in interpreting the world and communicating meaning through artistic media. Not less important, it requires the ability to connect children in meaningful ways to works of art, incorporating constructivist strategies (through, for example, “visual thinking strategies” developed by Abigail Housen and Philip Yanawene).

Thus, those who promote fine art in the schools wish schools to connect children to the conversation of great cultural heritage. This cannot be achieved if the children are not encouraged to connect to their art beyond seeing them as mere pieces for decorating notice boards around schools. Effective, relevant policies require the inclusion of school practitioners in deliberations with scholars and policy-makers to discuss about improving arts education. The increasing recognition of teachers as professionals with expertise and knowledge places arts specialists as instrumental partners for collaborative policymaking.

Most school practitioners lack art education expertise and as such must include these art specialists trained to teach or/and design teaching formulas for schools.

This research also recommends each child's expression should be given attention. This can be in a form of a little facial expression as even just a smile. A listening ear is a major sign their world and thoughts are also important and is worth someone's while. A little reward would even go the extra mile of encouraging the children to not only express themselves visually but also keep practicing to improve. Just like professional artist crave for rewards in exchange for their art, so do the children.

Most of the "blind side(s)" of an art class highlighted in this thesis such as unqualified art teachers, constrained time, lack of art studios, and other logistics are issues that might not be solved overnight. These are issues which would need some time for proper planning for a sustainable action to be taken. For instance, for already existing schools to include art studios in their architectural designs, they would need some planning and budgeting. However if the school authorities would first and foremost acknowledge the fact that learning art in a classroom is limiting then it would become easier to take positive steps in planning and addressing the issues over time. This would also ensure that similar problems are avoided in subsequent school establishments.

This research has discussed extensively the blind sides of learning art in classrooms in Chapter 5. However this is not in any way an attempt to actually condemn learning art in classrooms but rather to spot light on its blind side. Considering the extent to how limiting the classroom is in terms of learning art, this research highly recommends that classroom art teachers should encourage the children to make as much art as they can outside of the classroom without pre-decided themes. This I strongly believe would help them express themselves differently (more freely) when they see art expression more as a lifestyle. The ample freedom outside the classroom would be a great way to complement the confined experience they usually have when they create art in classrooms. This encouragement from their teachers would reinstate in them that art in the school and at home (elsewhere) are all self-expressions. Since most of the children understand the both to vary in function; art in school answers class questions while art at home (elsewhere) is freedom of expression.

I also strongly recommend that there might be a need for other researchers to also conduct similar research amongst other ethnics groups (especially in Africa) in an attempt to understand the meanings behind the visual art expressions (and other art expressions) of the children. Such studies can even lead to other studies whereby art expressions of different (already researched) ethnicities can be compared. My further research however I will pursue on Tiv children, I would follow up on their narrative expressions overtime. This would mean spending a more extensive time with them which could also allow me to subsequently broaden the scope of the research. Considering the fact that, I basically considered only visual art expressions in the midst of other mediums of expressions by the children.

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