



From crayons to canvas: the enlightenment of children at an arts festival

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Abstract

From crayons to paintings: Arts festivals and the promotion of children's art "Every child is an artist, but the problem is how to stay an artist when we grow up - Pablo Picasso". Art forms part of cultural history and education (Hetland & Winner, 2001), but also has valuable meaning for young people (Giddens, 1991) by expressing themselves about things they reflect on themselves and the world in which they live (Dobbs, 1998.) It is also a form of communication of how visual arts are seen as language and the how the artists opinions, feelings of expressing their ideas is brought to the fore. Bowen *et al.* (2013) state that although recent trends reduce exposure to art, it may be primarily due to the curtailment of school-based art programs. The latter proposes that children should be exposed to art by visiting museums, art galleries and cultural institutions and that it is important to teach them how to interpret and create visual arts messages at an early age (National Art Education, 2016). Only a small percentage of parents take their children to these types of institutions as artificial exposure and learn to experience art. While tourism research is increasing, including the perspectives of children, the voices of young preschool children are still lacking. Due to the government's constraints on funding for the arts, this has led to the rise of arts festivals. The private sector has also entered the market strongly, although not everyone can afford to do so. Festivals are just one platform whereby artists can promote their art, including singing, dance, visual arts and theatre. One such festival is Aardklop National Arts Festival, which has been held in South Africa since 1998. In 2016, Aardklop created an art safari to expose visual arts to young children between the ages of 6 and 13 years. The aim of this study was thus to determine the exposure that children find in art and whether they have learned something about visual arts either formally or as a leisure activity. A qualitative, experimental method of data collection was used to gather information from participating children, through a semi-structured interview before and after the art safari.

Keywords: Aardklop National Arts Festival, youth, qualitative, experimental, South Africa

Introduction

Arts form a part of cultural history, and education without it can lead to an impoverished society (Hetland & Winner, 2001). Pablo Picasso said, "Every child is an artist; the problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up". South Africa's first democratic President Nelson Mandela also wrote that education is the most powerful tool we have to change the world (Mandela, 2013). One consequence of government cutting funds for the arts is that the opportunity of learning is reduced (Belfiore & Bennett, 2007). Arts have a variety of benefits for students (Kisida, Greene & Bowen, 2013) as well as children because it helps develop self-expression, creativity, and empathy to name but a few (Dewey, 1919; Heilig, Cole & Aguilar, 2010). Russel



(1967) recognised that the arts enrich one's life, are components of culture since the beginning of time and that what we see and feel cannot always be portrayed in words alone. The author states in his final essay: "There is an artist imprisoned in each one of us, let loose to spread the joy everywhere". Zweig (1986) adds that art is not only for the artist, but also for those who experience it. Artworks inspire and create opportunities for learners and communities to use their imagination and offer them new ways to look at the past and the future. Belfiore and Bennett draw the conclusion that arts produce positive social impacts. Morris (2003) and other researchers add that it also relates to:

health, education, less crime, strong communities and even the economy. Arts have the power to transform lives and communities (Arts Council England, 2002); not only do they contribute to the factors mentioned above, but they also have valuable meaning for young people (Giddens, 1991) by giving them the opportunity to reflect upon their lives and the world they live in (Dobbs, 1998).

In this encounter between the young and their intentions, the images deliver messages from one person to another; this visual language thus mediates their opinions, feelings and ideas. Belfiore and Bennett (2007) summarise the statement by Morris (2003), saying that the experience of the arts is to generalise people's experience of the art within, across art forms and a diverse population, and adds to the creative industry. The White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage (1996: 6) defines arts as an expression by an individual through performance, execution, presentation, exhibition and transmission of collective creativity using dance, drama, music, visual art, crafts, design, and written or oral literature. Van Damme and Zijlmans (2008) describe arts as self-expression and communication. The 'arts' concept is broad and can be defined as comprising two divisions, namely the performing arts and the visual arts. The performing arts are ways to express opinion, emotion, feeling or taste by means of performance, whereas the visual arts (which can also include writing and literature) are ways to express all the above-mentioned through visual means and can also be referred to as fine arts. There is, furthermore, a relationship between the arts and tourism, especially at events and festivals (Hughes, 2012: 7; Richards, 2001) where artists and tourists meet each other. More and more festivals are creating an opportunity for artists to exhibit their work.

Festivals are just one platform where artists can promote and exhibit their art, including singing, dancing, visual arts and theatre; these festivals are known for their ability to fulfil cultural social and economic roles (Andersson & Getz, 2009; Getz, 1997). Saayman *et al.* (2005) add that festivals stimulate the growth of regional and local economies while also promoting specific destinations. One such festival is the Aardklop National Arts Festival that is annually held, since 1998, in Potchefstroom, South Africa. In 2016, Aardklop introduced an art safari, catering to young children between the ages of six and 13 years old to promote visual arts to children; this took place in three different venues, namely the NWU Botanical Garden, the Sanlam Auditorium and the NWU Gallery. The goal of this initiative was to invite children to join in the art festival and to teach them about the arts.

Lopatovska *et al.* (2016) mention that many scholars had developed an initiative to introduce visual literacy to older children (seven years old and up), but programmes for younger children (four to six years old) are still lacking. Although studies about art and children have been increasing in the last few years, the voices of young preschool learners are still missing. Bowen *et al.* (2013) state that, despite these trends, disadvantaged groups' exposure to the arts has decreased notably. This may primarily be due to the cuts in school-based arts programmes, which may not only deprive disadvantaged groups, but children overall. The authors further state that for children to be exposed to art, visitation to museums, art galleries and cultural institutions, it is important to teach them to interpret and create visual art messages at an early age. Only a small percentage of adults take their children to these kinds of exhibitions to learn about and experience art.



These alternative insights are essential for the tourism industry, especially when considering strategies for catering to and communicating with children and families with children. Since today's child is tomorrow's tourist, it becomes apparent that if one can grow the demand for festivals and the arts by investing in the youth, art festivals will also flourish in the future. Khoo-Lattimore (2015) confirms that there is still a lack of tourism-related knowledge from the perspective of children. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to determine the experience of children at an arts festival, what the learning aspect of this experience is and how knowledge is built.

Literature view

What is art?

Let's start with two very basic questions: "What is art?" and "Where does the word come from?" Art originated from its Proto-Indo-European root *ar-*, which means 'to fit together' and was later adopted as a prefix in the Latin *ars* (with *art-* as its stem) for artist and art, meaning skill, profession, science and knowledge. Still later, it was adopted in English as a skill, doing anything as the result of study, practice and human effort to initiate, alter or counteract. In the Middle Ages, art was taught in colleges and was known as 'liberal arts'. Students first learnt the theory and then the practice. These studies resulted in a Bachelor of Arts and then a Master of Arts degree, which included subjects such as Latin grammar, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music, but nothing regarding the creative arts (drawing, painting etc.) (Pinkerton, 1982). Barzun (1974) defines art as classics of all times and countries and sees art as being creative. The author further assumes that if art is of any importance, it is because it can shape the minds and emotions of men and women; in other words, it has moral and social significance and cannot be seen as only a form of entertainment or a way of passing the time. Tomlin (2007) states in her article that through art materials children are more encouraged to talk about what they have seen, heard or experienced. Through this method, it is a way of communication without speaking and develop their aesthetic sensitivities.

History of art education in South Africa

According to the Syllabus for Art Education in Primary Schools in the 1970s (Transvaal Education Department, 1977, now known as the Department of Basic Education), art was taught in all primary schools, from pre-primary to senior primary schools. These arts included drawing, painting, handcrafts, modelling, textile crafts, woodwork, metalwork, needlework and other techniques. Only at the senior level (standard five, which is now grade 7, with learners becoming 13 years old in that year), there were the following two distinct sections: The first section comprised the arts and crafts component, including drawing, painting et cetera. The second component comprised basic techniques and the sexes were taught separately. The girls were trained in basic needlework and knitting, whereas the boys were trained in wood- and metalwork.

In secondary school, these art subjects became independent subjects; in other words, learners either chose to take the subject in a non-school curriculum, or went to schools that offered the subject, comprising paper crafts, textile crafts and graphic arts. Needlework was combined with cookery and mothercraft, also known as home economics. At the tertiary level (universities and technikons), students could choose from a variety of fields. These included art as a major subject, theoretical and practical aspects of the arts and the choice to continue with a post-graduate degree. Students could also choose to study one to four years, depending on the specific course they registered for; the shorter the course, the less intensive the training and the less value it had in teaching the student to become an art teacher (Yule, 1989).

Hoadley, Christie and Ward (2009) state that the South African schooling system has undergone a seismic shift, whereas Elliot (2016) makes a bold statement by saying that the schooling system is worse off since 1994; this deterioration is explained by the constant



changes in the education system. The Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST) stipulated in 1996 that art has to contribute to poverty alleviation (producing artists and entrepreneurs) and reconciliation building. The chairperson of the National Arts Council of South Africa explained that until 1994, the majority of South Africans did not have the freedom to study subjects in art, music and dance where and when they wanted to.

The National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) was introduced in 2013 to reduce the learning areas for learners who advanced from grade 3 to grade 4. The subject Life Skills therefore includes personal and social well-being, physical education and creative arts (comprising visual and performing arts). Elliot (2016) states that although different components form the Life Skills subject, the same educator teaches all aspects, including arts, which are specialised fields of study. The author continues by saying that the implication of this is that the educator is teaching subjects without adequate training skills or knowledge. Arts are only separate subjects from grade 5 to grade 9. The problem is that only a small number of learners attend these subjects and only a few top schools offer it.

Yule (1989: 19) explains that teaching is a medium of education, but that not all teaching is educative and people must not be confused in thinking that teaching has to take place in school. It can also be done in an extra-curricular way, implying that it is done through private lessons. Educative art teaching comprises more than just telling the child how to draw a picture, and this is not possible if knowledge about art is absent. Yule further explains that in all teaching situations, the teachers must structure the lesson and methods to be used to fulfil the needs of each learner in the classroom, which will lead to involvement and the enhancement of creativity. In the art class, the teacher has no limit to what can be done in class with regard to ingenuity, improvisation, selection of media and art activities to influence the learners in many spheres. In this context, the teacher is not only instructing the learner, but also encouraging creativity (Yule, 1989).

Previous studies in art education focused on artistic development, curriculum studies and pedagogical teaching theories and methods (Júlíusdóttir, 2003: 4). Furthermore, literature focused on the meaning of art in everyday life and the process of identity construction (Sava, 1998); self-identify through art (Rantala, 1998); interpreting works that can be used in understanding and creating the self (Räsänen, 1998); Cullingford's (1995) exclusive invitation to children and young people to be active research participants; the influence of children on family holiday decision-making (Carr, 2006; Howard & Madrigal, 1990; Nanda *et al.*, 2007; Nickerson & Jurowski, 2001; Segumpan, Zahari & Jamaluddin, 2008; Tagg & Seaton, 1995; Therkelsen, 2010; Thornton *et al.*, 1997; Wang *et al.*, 2004); and families' vacation activities (Howard & Madrigal, 1990; Thornton *et al.*, 1997). Although all the above studies used children in their research, the focus was not on the learning of children at arts festivals, the importance of children's exposure to arts or how to interpret and appreciate art. The latter is, according to the authors and to their best knowledge, the first of its kind.

Tourism studies in which the focus was on children revealed the following: First, existing studies revealing children's roles in family vacations have been conducted mostly from adults' perspectives and through the voices of either their parents (e.g., Lehto, Choi, Lin & MacDermid, 2009; Segumpan *et al.*, 2008; Thornton *et al.*, 1997; Turley, 2001) or other adult stakeholders (Gaines, Hubbard, Witte & O'Neill, 2004). This approach, namely to collect data from parents and other adults, has been criticised for its many limitations, although it is methodologically rigorous. Nickerson and Jurowski (2001) selected children between 10 and 17 years old, whereas Blichfeldt *et al.*'s (2011) participants were between eight and 12 years old (Tagg & Seaton, 1995; Carr, 2006; Small, 2008). Literature shows that in all tourism studies that include children, the youngest recorded age for participation is five (Hilbrecht *et al.*, 2008), six (Schänzel, 2012; Schänzel & Smith, 2011) and seven years (Cullingford, 1995; Gram, 2005). Hilbrecht *et al.* (2008) state that when they attempted to use children from five years old up, they needed their parents during the interview, which resulted in the latter imposing on



the children's responses. Although tourism scholars are focusing increasingly on the perspectives of children, the voices of young preschool learners are still missing. Zweig (1986) adds that art is not only for the artist, but also for those who experience it. Artworks inspire and create opportunities for learners and communities.

Second, the literature yielded more results, but there was still no link between festivals' visual arts exhibitions and the interpretation of children visiting the exhibitions. Critical success factors of visual arts managers and art exhibitions, how they influence the visitors' expectations, how this process alters experiences, and how managers can manage these alterations to ensure sustainability are very important, since visitors to art exhibitions differ in profile (as visual arts have different categories) concerning their expectations of what they view as important to enhance their experience (Borstlap & Saayman, 2016). It is therefore clear that more research in this field of study is required to understand children's views and needs concerning the arts, especially at events and festivals.

Method of research

A qualitative, experimental method of data collection was used to collect data from participating children by conducting a semi-structured interview before and after the art safari. The sample consisted of 49 children (five to 13 years old) interviewed from 2 to 5 October 2016. The parents were approached by fieldworkers who explained the purpose of the study and invited their child (ren) to participate, as well as asked permission to record the interviews. Seeking consent from parents is not uncommon in research with children; in fact, it is required in this case (Greenfield, 2004). It has been found that children as young as four years old are "competent and capable regarding giving consent" (Hedges, 2002: 39).

The interviews were guided by a simple questionnaire to accommodate children from five to 13 years of age and to enable them to provide short answers. Parents registered on the online site through the festival webpage, depending on the age of the child. The first tour was for children aged between six and nine years and the second tour started 30 minutes later for children aged between ten and 13 years.

The purpose of this questionnaire was to determine children's understanding of art, their art preference, art exposure and whether they participated in art as an extra subject after school hours. Each child was interviewed before the programme started and given a number to be able to ask the follow-up questions. Basic sociodemographic observations were made, for example the language and gender of the child.

The safari lasted about three hours. Upon completion of the tour (after three hours), the children were surveyed for the second time. A set of three follow-up questions were asked to assess their experience of the exhibitions as well as the learning factor. They were asked whether they had learnt something and they had to justify their answer. Lastly, they were asked whether they wanted to revisit the displayed art. The interviews were recorded again and paired with the same number allocated to the child in order to pair it with the same child's questionnaire. The interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim.

Results

This section is threefold: firstly, the profile of the attendants at the art exhibition will be discussed; secondly, the results of the first interview with the children will be explained; and lastly, a follow-up of the question about the experience and learning before the exhibition will be put into perspective.

18 of the respondents were boys and 29 were girls (see Table 1). The average age was ten years. The majority of the children attended local schools in Potchefstroom; other towns



include Pretoria, Klerksdorp, Upington, Ventersdorp and Reitz. All the respondents were very positive about the prospect of learning from this experience.

Table 1: Profile of children who participated in the art safari

Aspects	Children
Gender	29 female, 18 male
Age	5-13 years old
Language	Afrikaans (95%)
Town	The majority (87%) lived in Potchefstroom.
Expectation of learning before the exhibition safari	The majority of the children indicated 'yes', except one who indicated 'maybe' and 'no', respectively.
Type of art	paintings (21); photography (12); everything (6); drawings (2)
Participate in art classes after school	The majority (80%) indicated 'no', except 18% who indicated 'yes' and 2% who took art as a subject at their school.
Visited galleries before?	50%: 'no'; 9%: 'sometimes'; 40%: 'yes'
Participated in art exhibitions before?	72%: 'no'; 20%: 'yes'; 9%: 'yes', at school
Learnt something new?	46 indicated 'yes', with one who indicated 'no'
Enjoyed the safari?	All participants answered 'yes'.

Source: Authors' own work

Results with regard to learning

Children attending the art safari exhibition were asked if they knew anything about art and what they thought they were going to learn that day. The last question (whether they thought they were going to learn something) was asked before the safari and they were asked to justify their answer. Based on the first interviews with the children, three themes were identified, namely the history of art and artists' works, appreciation and ethnic interpretation of art and, lastly, a lack of knowledge of art and a willingness to learn (as indicated by Table 2).

Table 2: Results from interviews prior to the tour (first interview)

Themes	Prior expectation
History of art and artists' works	Only 16% (7 out of 45) of the children indicated something with regard to learning about history, art and/or artists' works. Four children indicated that they were going to look at and learn about the artists' works, the history of art and what everyone was doing.
Appreciation and ethnic interpretation of art	14% of the children gave answers that were relevant to the appreciation and interpretation of art. When they were asked about their appreciation of art, the majority answered that they liked it.
A lack of knowledge of art and a willingness to learn	The majority (50%) of the children said that art looked like fun and that they had no knowledge about art; the other half, though, indicated that they were going to learn about plants.

After the safari tour, the children were approached to answer three follow-up questions. In the first question, they were asked whether they had learnt anything new; they were also asked to justify their answer. From all the answers, three themes were identified (as seen in Table 3).



Table 3: Results of the second interview

Themes	After the tour
Appreciation and interpretation of art	56% of the children gave knowledgeable answers on how to appreciate art and they realised that art has meaning. One replied, “Art cannot always be pretty and art has meaning”. Another child responded, “Different art is deep and has insights, and the different artist(s) use different mediums”.
Creation of art	33% of the children gained knowledge on how to create art and use different materials. One answered that “you could make art out of differed things” and it was interesting that “one can use even matches”. One initially thought that “art is just about pencils and paintings, but there are different ways to create art”.
Uncertainty	12% answered that they did not know whether they had learnt anything. One even indicated that he/she “learnt nothing”.

In the second question, they were asked whether they enjoyed the art safari, and all of them (100%) answered ‘yes’. They were asked to explain their answer; again, three themes were identified (as seen in Table 4).

Table 4: Appreciation of the tour

Themes	Answers after the tour
Expectation	Some (22%) of the answers were: “(I) did not know what to expect”; (It was) different (from) what I expected or what I anticipated”; “(I) thought it is going to be different”; “(It was) very interesting”; and “(I) thought it is going to be boring”.
Not impressed	The minority (2%) indicated that they did not enjoy it.
Impressed	The majority (76%) understood art better and they were very surprised and impressed with artists creating art.

Findings and implications

Although some scholars question the method of using young children in interviews to obtain information, this study found that children definitely have a clear opinion and that they are not too young at six years old for researchers to gain insight into their thoughts.

The first finding relates to the timing of the survey. Using an experimental approach is a sound way to evaluate this type of research. The timing of a survey, namely before, during or after an event, could have serious consequences for decision-making and could have an effect on repeat visits, but not necessarily. It could also provide a false impression of aspects that require change. This implies that academics and managers need to take cognisance of the issue of timing concerning a survey, especially where children are involved. They should also be cautious when deciding at which time the research should be conducted (before, during or after an event). What we have learnt is that surveys should be done in a combination of pre-, during- and post-event times or should be done regularly to obtain the best results. The experimental approach has also been found to be very successful for this type of research.

The second finding is that children can learn about art during a short period of time. This finding supports the results of Hooper-Greenhill and Moussouri (2002) and Dawson (2006), who state that learning is a process of active engagement with experience, which may involve skill enhancement, knowledge, understanding, values, feelings, attitude and the capacity to reflect. This will lead to the desire to change and to learn more. Art is a form of communication and is present in experiences, feelings and thoughts in a visible manner (Júlíusdóttir, 2003:



4). Children learn to create visual symbols, which ultimately develop visual literacy. Júlíusdóttir (2003) further explained that visual literacy does not only include the creation of art, but also discussions about it; through discussion, children's experiences are extended. Parents can help with this process by exposing children to various safe materials, sizes, shapes, and textures (Johnson, 2008). Active experiences with visual arts enable children to develop visual and verbal expression and, at the same time, contribute to their appreciation of art in the long haul. All it takes is someone with knowledge about art to teach and explain to them how it works.

Implementing art safaris at festivals will enable children of all races to both appreciate and learn about art which would also then serve to bridge the racial divides in South Africa. Art galleries and museums can initiate art holiday or after-school programmes, which will lead to more exposure and insight. Unal (2012) confirmed that museums offer opportunities to children to gain appreciation of art and self-expression. Children can only experience, understand, know and discover through the experiences that they were exposed to by their peers or adults. For children to comment on, analyse and ponder over art, they need to be provided with the opportunity to be actively engaged in it. Kirchberg and Trondle (2015: 174), who also state that while visiting the exhibition there are factors that can change the visitors' experiences, for example what they look at, their assessment of the art, their engagement, their learning experience as well as their emotional and cognitive responses (also to other visitors or staff members), are of the opinion that an art safari is a wonderful way of introducing art and the appreciation thereof from a very young age.

The third finding revealed that if children are exposed to differed mediums of visual art, they can create with different materials afterwards and are not limited to pencils and paint anymore. Art-making is defined by Dobbs (1998) as the process of responding to observations, ideas, feelings and other experiences by creating works of art with different tools and techniques, and applying these various media in a skilful, thoughtful and imaginative manner. Johnson (2008) adds that young children can learn to convey visually created messages, not only through reading and writing, constructing and decoding words, but also through painting, creating clay collages and drawings. The implications are that children can learn new methods and be creative from a young age, and some will eventually make a living out of it. Festivals attract all kinds of persons, and art managers need to use the marketing strategies of the festival organisers to create curiosity among these visitors and expose them to the different aspects of what art has to offer, especially to young children.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to determine the experience of children at an arts festival, as well as their views on art. This research, which is one of the first of its kind conducted at an arts festival, suggests that art exhibitions are not age restricted and should involve visitors from very young to very old. One of the more surprising aspects of this study was the many children respondents we obtained for participants. Our findings support the literature that states if parents and caregivers involve children in active engagement in art-making, it can lead to positive social encounters. Nonetheless, creativity is directly impacted by the culture and climate that invariably envelops learners. Before the learners can be supported to develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions they require to exploit their latent creativity, a culture and climate that is apposite to this learning must be available. Thus it is critically important to provide a positive resourced, classroom and teaching ethos must be in place that is constructive, and is rooted in the notion that all learners have a right to learn and express themselves artistically.

Art is learning in and through active engagement that unites mind and body, emotion and intellect, object and subject. Art matters, because experiences in the arts offer opportunities



to develop creativity and imagination, and to experience joy, beauty and wonder. Art is also about the enrichment of lives, developing new ways of expression, knowledge and feelings.

If children are exposed to art's different forms and its history, they are more likely to express themselves and discover their talents. Art is not just about painting and drawing, it is a story that is expressed by an individual. When children are older, they can exploit their talent or knowledge that they were once exposed to and loved. It is clear from the research that these children were only exposed for three hours to different art in three galleries, but in that small frame of time, they already learnt something new.

By exposing children to art, history and different mediums at a young age, it is not just a way for them to express themselves, but some could also become entrepreneurs. This confirms the findings of Belfiore and Bennett (2007), who said that art has a positive effect on people.

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