

## **The Aims of Arts Education**

### **1. Uphold the human right to education and cultural participation**

International declarations and conventions aim at securing for every child and adult the right to education and to opportunities that will ensure full and harmonious development and participation in cultural and artistic life. The basic rationale for making Arts Education an important and, indeed, compulsory part of the educational programme in any country emerges from these rights.

Culture and the arts are essential components of a comprehensive education leading to the full development of the individual. Therefore, Arts Education is a universal human right, for all learners, including those who are often excluded from education, such as immigrants, cultural minority groups, and people with disabilities. These assertions are reflected in the following statements about human rights and the rights of the child.

#### **The Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

##### Article 22

‘Everyone, as a member of society ... is entitled to realization of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.’

##### Article 26

‘Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.’

##### Article 27

‘Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.’

#### **The Convention on the Rights of the Child**

##### Article 29

‘The education of the child shall be directed to ... (a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential...’

##### Article 31

‘State parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.’

### **2. Develop Individual Capabilities**

Humans all have creative potential. The arts provide an environment and practice where the learner is actively engaged in creative experiences, processes, and development. Research<sup>1</sup> indicates that introducing learners to artistic processes, while incorporating elements of their own culture into education, cultivates in each individual a sense of creativity and initiative, a fertile imagination, emotional intelligence and a moral “compass”, a capacity for critical reflection, a sense of autonomy, and freedom of thought and action. Education in and through the arts also stimulates cognitive development and can make how and what learners learn more relevant to the needs of the modern societies in which they live.

As extensive educational literature illustrates, experiencing and developing appreciation and knowledge of the arts enables the development of unique perspectives on a wide range of subject areas; perspectives which cannot be discovered through other educational means.

In order for children and adults to participate fully in cultural and artistic life, they need to progressively learn to understand, appreciate and experience artistic expressions by which fellow humans – often called artists – explore, and share insights on, various aspects of existence and coexistence. As it is a goal to give all people equal opportunities for cultural and artistic activity, artistic education needs to be a compulsory part of educational programmes for all. Arts education should also be systematic and be provided over a number of years as it is a long term process.

Arts Education contributes to an education which integrates physical, intellectual, and creative faculties and makes possible more dynamic and fruitful relations among education, culture, and the arts.

These capabilities are particularly important in the face of the challenges present in 21st century society. For example, due to societal changes which affect family structures, children are often deprived of parental attention. In addition, due to lack of communication and relationship-building in their family life, children often experience a variety of emotional and social problems. Moreover, transmission of cultural traditions and artistic practices within family environments is becoming more difficult, especially in urban areas.

Today, there exists a growing divide between cognitive and emotional processing that reflects a greater focus in learning environments on the development of cognitive skills, and a lesser value placed on emotional processes. According to Professor Antonio Damasio, this emphasis on the development of cognitive skills, to the detriment of the emotional sphere, is a factor in the decline in moral behavior in modern society. Emotional processing is an integral part in the decision-making process and works as a vector for actions and ideas, establishing reflection and judgment. Without an emotional involvement, any action, idea or decision would be based purely on rational terms. Sound moral behavior, which constitutes the solid grounding of the citizen, requires emotional participation. Professor Damasio suggests that Arts Education, by

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<sup>1</sup> For examples of research studies and evidence, refer to the reports from preparatory meetings for the World Conference on Arts Education; cf. LEA International at <http://www.unesco.org/culture/lea> as well as *Educating for Creativity: Bringing the Arts and Culture into Asian Education*, Report of the Asian Regional Symposia on Arts Education, UNESCO 2005.

encouraging emotional development, can bring about a better balance between cognitive and emotional development and thereby contribute to supporting a culture of peace.

21<sup>st</sup> Century societies are increasingly demanding workforces that are creative, flexible, adaptable and innovative and education systems need to evolve with these shifting conditions. Arts Education equips learners with these skills, enabling them to express themselves, critically evaluate the world around them, and actively engage in the various aspects of human existence.

Arts Education is also a means of enabling nations to develop the human resources necessary to tap their valuable cultural capital. Drawing on these resources and capital is essential if countries wish to develop strong and sustainable cultural (creative) industries and enterprises. Such industries have the potential to play a key role in enhancing socio-economic development in many less-developed countries.

Moreover, for many people, cultural industries (such as publishing, the music, film and television industries, and other media) and cultural institutions (such as museums, music venues, cultural centres, art galleries and theatres) serve as key gateways by which to access culture and the arts. Arts Education programmes can help people to discover the variety of cultural expressions offered by the cultural industries and institutions, and to critically respond to them. In turn, cultural industries serve a resource for educators seeking to incorporate the arts into education.

### **3. Improve the Quality of Education**

According to the Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report of 2006, published by UNESCO, while the number of children with access to education is growing, the quality of education remains low in most countries of the world. Providing education for all is important, but it is equally vital that students are given an education of good quality.<sup>2</sup>

“Quality education” is learner-centred and can be defined by three principles: education that is relevant to the learner but also promotes universal values, education which is equitable in terms of access and outcomes and guarantees social inclusion rather than exclusion, and education which reflects and helps to fulfil individual rights.<sup>3</sup>

Quality education can therefore generally be understood as being education that provides all young people and other learners with the locally-relevant abilities required for them to function successfully in their society; is appropriate in terms of the students’ lives, aspirations and interests, as well as those of their families and societies; and is inclusive and rights-based.

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<sup>2</sup> UNESCO, 2005, EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006, UNESCO, Paris, p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO, 2004, EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005, UNESCO, Paris, p. 30.

According to the Dakar Framework for Action<sup>4</sup>, many factors are required as prerequisites for quality education. Learning in and through the arts (Arts Education and Arts-in-Education) can enhance at least four of these factors: active learning; a locally-relevant curriculum that captures the interest and enthusiasm of learners; respect for, and engagement with, local communities and cultures; and trained and motivated teachers.

#### **4. Promote the Expression of Cultural Diversity**

The arts are both the manifestation of culture as well as the means of communication of cultural knowledge. Each culture has unique artistic expressions and cultural practices. The diversity of cultures and their creative, artistic products represent contemporary and traditional forms of human creativity which uniquely contribute to the nobility, heritage, beauty and integrity of human civilizations.

Awareness and knowledge of cultural practices and art forms strengthens personal and collective identities and values, and contributes to safeguarding and promoting cultural diversity. Arts Education both fosters cultural awareness and promotes cultural practices, and is the means by which knowledge and appreciation of the arts and culture are transmitted from one generation to the next.

In many countries both tangible and intangible aspects of cultures are being lost because they are not valued in the education system or are not being transmitted to future generations. There is therefore a clear need for education systems to incorporate and transmit cultural knowledge and expressions. This can be achieved through Arts Education, in both formal and non-formal educational settings.

Several of the Main Lines of Action for the implementation of the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, agreed on by Member States in 2001, highlight this necessity, including:

Action Line 6: Encouraging linguistic diversity – while respecting the mother tongue – at all levels of education, wherever possible, and fostering the learning of several languages from the earliest age.

Action Line 7: Promoting through education an awareness of the positive value of cultural diversity and improving to this end both curriculum design and teacher education.

Action Line 8: Incorporating, where appropriate, traditional pedagogies into the education process with a view to preserving and making full use of culturally appropriate methods of communication and transmission of knowledge.

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<sup>4</sup> Dakar Framework for Action, 2000, [http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/ed\\_for\\_all/framework.shtml](http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/ed_for_all/framework.shtml)