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Ways of Approaching Culture, Arts, Peace/Conflict in Education

“*Ring the Bells for Arts Education*”, the World Alliance for Arts Education (WAAE), announces the program for the WAAE celebrations of the International Week of Arts Education 2022. The hashtags appeared on social channels: #International Arts Education Week, #peace education, #quality education, #good health, #peace and justice. Ringing the bells on a specific day is a sign of support. Generally, I tend to be sceptical of the benefits of such celebrations. Yet here we have an invitation to the only international organization that activates a network of the four big established organizations: International Drama/Theatre and Education Association (IDEA), International Society of Education through Art (InSEA), International Society for Music Education (ISME) and World Dance Alliance (WDA). WAAE, established in Lisbon in 2006, has a powerful voice for advocacy, networking, and research: “Collectively, the arts offer young people unique opportunities to understand and create their own cultural and personal identities” (WAAE, 2006).

It was followed by the first world creativity summit in Hong Kong in 2007. I had the honor to participate and could feel the energy and the feeling of mission we all had there.

Another milestone was *The Seoul Agenda: Goals for the Development of Arts Education*, a significant outcome of UNESCO’s Second World Conference on Arts Education held in Seoul in 2010. Issues included but were not limited to: “Peace, cultural diversity and intercultural understanding [...]. Equally, participants agreed that arts education can make a direct contribution to resolving the social and cultural challenges facing the world today” (UNESCO, 2010). The Seoul Agenda serves as a concrete plan of action for the Road Map of Lisbon 2006.

The year 2010 has been followed by a decade of continuing growing interest in arts education. Note that the different arts have contributed to the development of curricula, teaching approaches and research since the 1960s. However, only since around 2000 did the research begin to flourish. The reason may be that WAAE collaborates

with governments, networks, institutions, communities, and individuals, significantly advancing the arts in education regarding fieldwork in formal and non-formal educational systems, worldwide conferences, and research. Numerous works created the atmosphere for WAAE to be formed, and others were blooming owing to WAAE and the Seoul Agenda their inspiration.

First, I'll mention the *Wow Factor: A global research compendium on the impact of arts in education* by Anne Bamford (2006). She conducted the first international research and analysis of the impact of the arts on children and young people. Then, the seminal work of Liora Bresler changed the research face of the field with her *International Handbook of Research in Arts Education* (2007). She managed to provide a distillation of knowledge in the various arts education disciplines and captured the connections between practice and theory in the field. Following is a series of *edited* books (among them: Burnard & Hennessy, 2006; Liebau, Wagner & Wyman, 2013; Schonmann, 2015; Fleming, Bresler & O'Toole, 2015; Berggraf Saebo, 2016; Lum & Wagner, 2019). Then, a list of articles published in several journals inspire the discussions. The founding of the *International Journal for Research in Cultural, Aesthetic, and Arts Education* is a necessary platform for the broad spectrum of possible topics for a global polylogue.

With the rich literature accumulated from around the 2000s, one can easily extract the ways of approaching culture and arts in education. The mainstream addresses social, political, and community agendas in the arts. A few common themes can be identified as follows:

- The majority of works speak the same language (from sociology and social sciences, health and politics). Frequently used terms, among others, are: diversity, sustainability, social cohesion, policies, coexist, interact or merge – processes, and inclusiveness. Add to these: immigration, globalization, gender, integration, and assimilation – ways of understanding, practices of knowing, tolerance, and resilience.
- An instrumental approach to the arts, arts as a vehicle.
- References to the conventional arts rooted in defined disciplines: music, visual arts, dance, theatre, and literature. However, new forms of art in the digital media are now taking their first steps.
- Though most classical arts have a separate inquiry field of study, more and more articles begin to address generic issues common to all the arts.

We can assert that the spirit of the Seoul Agenda is prospering; the Arts, as a collective body, refer mainly to building a *culture* of Arts in Education (Schonmann, 2017). Though we do not yet have the proper perspective to weigh the impact of the development of such knowledge, we need to ask critical questions such as: Can we accept that the instrumental-social characteristics will continue to define the *core* of the field of Arts Education? Why has the language of the arts been almost overlooked? What is the *intrinsic value* of the arts that is misused? A brief look at the state of Peace/Conflict in arts education may support the above queries.

Peace Education through Arts is well embedded in the WAAE Lisbon 2006 credo and The Seoul Agenda goals of 2010. Furthermore, it is one of the main goals of many international organizations such as UNESCO and national organizations such as the British Council and the American Council for the Arts, and research centers at universities worldwide. In many projects, the purpose of arts for peace is not art itself but rather the means to convey conflict transformation objectives (Zembylas & Bekerman, 2013; Cohen, 2014; Schonmann, 2002; O'Farrell, 2019).

As a tool that can express emotions and thoughts, act on the senses, and create visual images, as well as verbal and non-verbal texts, art is a valuable means to escape from a harsh conflicting situation and is a kind of shelter that gives hope. But we do not have enough evidence of its influences in the long run. Nevertheless, the belief and the expectation are that *arts can foster* positive behavioral change.

A valuable report by Alison Baily (2019) highlights the strengths of arts and cultural programs during times of conflict, along with an explicit warning about the harm that *unrealistic expectations* from arts interventions can cause: "The ability of the arts to transform conflict in and of themselves must not be overstated and that, like other interventions, they can even exacerbate conflict" (p. 4). We no longer accept the naive thought that arts alone may achieve peace (Schonmann, 2014). However, the goal remains: Arts for Peace activities can contribute to transforming existing conflict in the community (Hunter & Cohen, 2019).

Do we have an answer to the question: How can the Arts work on the physical and the spiritual dimensions and be sustainable? Not yet, but we are in the midst of a genuine combined effort to pave the ways to achieve worthwhile goals. However, on this road of doing, searching and investigating, we tend to forget that the *intrinsic values* of the arts are the core from which *extrinsic* fields should be fertilized. I would like to be clear: I am not against the instrumental ways of approaching arts in education in defined circumstances. But I favour giving *predominance* to the *Arts as Arts* in education (Winner, Goldstein & Vincent-Lancrin, 2013). The delicate position of *Arts for Arts' sake* in education in the last three decades is caused by the expansion of Applied Arts. We risk losing sight of the artistic and aesthetic core concept if the dominant path addresses mainly the art's social, political, community and therapeutic agendas. Arts education has to approach life experiences without disregarding the core features that qualify it as Art – trivializing what counts as art by using it as a means risks missing the essence. My point is that the nature and value of the arts in education should be encoded within the realm of *aesthetic experiences* already employed by Dewey (1934). Dewey offers us something we should endorse and continue with, as Eisner, for example, develops a way of aesthetic knowing (Eisner, 2002).

Without entering into the complex debate about the distinctions between *experiences* in the *fine arts* and 'aesthetics of *everyday life*' (Ratiu, 2013), I argue for the aesthetic-artistic investigation to take its place in the discussion not only to enrich or to

decorate the discourse but to be its core. When approaching arts in education from this standpoint, we invigorate the power of the aesthetic as a crucial impact on better-world-making (Saito, 2011).

The aesthetic and artistic language is almost absent from the discourse. Thus I recall Desmond Tutu's wisdom: "Language is very powerful. Language does not just describe reality. Language creates the reality it describes" (Tutu, 2015). The connection between art and society has been at the centre of discussions on the aesthetics and philosophy of art from the beginning of the modern era to the present day. Whether it is the autonomy of art, the merging of the arts, art for the sake of art, the politicization of art, or the essential status of art as an opposition to social sustainability (Zuckermann, 1997), this short piece belongs to these complex issues that have always preoccupied the implications of art. The founding of the *International Journal for Research in Cultural, Aesthetic, and Arts Education* is a perfect space to welcome and encourage such debates.

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