

**Opening Speech by UNESCO's Representative, Milagros del Corral, Deputy Assistant Director-General for Culture and Director of the Division of Arts and Cultural Enterprise at the Regional Meeting on Arts Education in the European Countries, Canada and the United States of America
(Helsinki, Finland – 9-12 August 2003)**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is both an honour and a pleasure to represent the Director-General of UNESCO, Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, at the opening session of the Regional Meeting on Arts Education in the European Countries, Canada and the United States of America entitled “ARTS IN EDUCATION - COOPERATION OVER BORDERS”.

First of all, allow me to express my deepest thanks to Tintti Karppinen, Vice-President of IDEA, who has achieved the challenge imposed upon her for organizing this conference. I am extremely grateful to her and to the Finnish National Commission for UNESCO for the organization of this meeting and for their interest in UNESCO's programmes and objectives relating to arts and creativity.

Tintti Karppinen, together with other executive officers of NGO's linked with arts and education subjects is one of UNESCO's main partners in the promotion and development of our programme related to arts in education.

Indeed, in 2000, UNESCO started its action towards arts in education and creativity as a major field of knowledge to be taught to children and adolescents in the school environment and out of school. This programme is based on an extensive research on the

impact of arts in education and creativity, not only for art's sake but also for the development of children's cognitive, communication and reasoning skills.

We all know that apprenticeship of the arts and creativity takes on particular significance. There is much practice going on in the field. However the arts are often neglected in the school environment in favour of subjects considered "useful", such as science and technology. Arts education has always been considered as an option, a subject not considered necessary. Yet several factors now plead in favour of its integration into school teaching.

At a time when the interior of the school, traditionally protected, is being invaded by all sorts of deviations, resulting from the anti-social behaviour of children and adolescents (violence, drugs, delinquency, etc.) with the risk of becoming a place of social and cultural conflict, it has become clear that they must learn to live together and use their creative thinking to resolve the conflicts which they have to face in their daily lives.

In this respect arts activities enhance children's self-awareness, self-confidence and acceptance of others. Many researches project have concluded that arts education keeps students in school. This is especially true for youngsters at risk or with special learning problems, as their energies can be directed towards arts activities in the more secure and disciplined school environment.

Moreover arts activities not only reduce children's negative attitudes toward school, but can also help children to develop a positive attitude and sense of motivation. Some

researches in the United States based on classroom observations, interviews and analysis of materials has demonstrated that disciplines in the arts and humanities make a greater impact on the spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development of children and young people than disciplines such as design, technology, science, mathematics or information technology.

Another vital question, which deserves mention when dealing with matters relating to the content of school programmes and types of teaching, is that of globalisation. Using the indirect, most advanced means of the new technologies, the dominant aspects of global culture are being extended to children and adolescents who, through a lack of appreciation of their own culture, become passive listeners and viewers without the necessary objectivity or sufficient knowledge to evaluate or make any judgement. Therefore, bearing in mind the weight and dominating presence of this phenomenon, it seems reasonable to expect basic school education and the primary school to bring alive local and popular cultures by introducing them into the curriculum in a practical manner.

Another important point upon which experts are agreed is the necessity to begin to open the school doors to professionals in general and to artists in particular, in order that the theoretic elements as taught by the teachers and professors can be experienced in a more concrete and living manner. In this precise context, the introduction to the arts in the form of practical creative workshops has a universal aim since it can serve as a conductor between the scientific and artistic disciplines, thus encouraging an interdisciplinary approach to knowledge.

One of the principal innovative elements linked to the introduction of the arts into the school environment is that they should be grounded on the practice of a discipline such as drama, music, the plastic arts, etc. and not simply on the transmission of knowledge.

What the artist transmits to the child or adolescent is a concrete and living relationship with a cultural activity, a knowledge and a know-how emanating from a sensitivity, long familiarity and experience, whereas school knowledge and its customary restrictions sometimes combine to undo the link between culture and feeling, knowledge and experience. The artist as an individual anchored in the aesthetic tradition, is entrusted with a tradition as much as he or she is a vehicle for creative ability.

Approaching artistic creativity from the technical and scientific aspect will greatly help the child and the adolescent to develop their creative spirit.

This kind of approach to creativity and the practice of the arts demands not so much productive and disciplinary aptitudes, nor even competence in a hierarchical regime of knowledge and the roles which have been formative for humanity, but artistic and expressive activity as a condition of the critical and communicational activity of individuals and groups.

It is precisely by extending the limits of the hierarchy of knowledge and the distribution of roles that art and creativity will be able to provide possibilities for children and adolescents to exercise their critical capacities and accede to knowledge.

The benefits of the practice of arts for the emotional, intellectual and psychological well-being of a child no longer need to be demonstrated. The numerous studies that have been carried out on the subject have shown it. There should however be some emphasis on the role of music, theatre and dance, as well as sport, in developing team spirit, solidarity and a civic spirit (the part played by children and adolescents in the development of their towns or cities through a better perception of their heritage, the painting of walls, etc., for example).

Bearing in mind the latter considerations UNESCO, together with IDEA, INSEA and ISME had initiated a worldwide programme that intends to:

- Study the presence, means and contents of arts education in the school environment in the different geo-cultural regions;
- Produce pedagogical material that would help and support Member States, school teachers, artists and trainers to teach arts and creativity in and out the schools environments, and
- Research on the methods and instruments that would permit measuring the impact of arts and education in the development of children's behaviour, academic and affective skills.

Up to now, since this programme was launched research has been undertaken in five regional in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Arab States, the Pacific and Europe and North America. Regional meetings that brought together teachers, representatives of Ministries of Culture and Education had followed each research programme.

All the documentation produced in preparation to and for the various regional meetings are published on the Internet on a website called LEA International. LEA stands for *Links to Education and Arts*.

Parallel to this website which will be launched in October 2003 on the occasion of the 32 session of the UNESCO General Conference, booklets on the teaching of traditional arts and creativity are being published. The first one entitled *Cultural Heritage, Creativity and Education for All in Africa*, is available in English and French and was published in 2002. Two other booklets will be issued before the end of 2003, one relating to arts teaching in Latin America and the Caribbean and another will address problems and perspectives of the teaching of the arts in the Pacific Region. Hopefully, we will also be able in 2004 to publish the results of this meeting.

Later on this year, in November, we will hold another regional meeting for the Asian region. This meeting will focus on ways and means to measure the impact of arts education on children's academic achievements. If we succeed to produce the cultural indicators to measure such an impact on the learning abilities of the students, then we will

be able to test these tools in 2004. We have also planned to convene a world congress in 2005 on these issues which will be the first international event organized in the field of arts education. The Agenda of our meeting here in Helsinki, provides some time, on Tuesday, to debate with you on this issue.

Coming back to today's Conference, which is devoted to research and practices in European Arts education, the main focus is put on the use of drama, theatre, dance, music and visual arts in young people's education in collaboration with refugees and immigrants. This is an extremely difficult but most important subject to which UNESCO gives a priority, within the framework of its Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. We are persuaded that the key issue to promote cultural diversity is education, and more particularly cultural education. This is why this very meeting will certainly bring answers to important questions that are currently being put to us as we are working on the ways and methods of implementing various items of this Universal Declaration. One of them is particularly relevant to our Conference. This is the reaffirmation "that culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs".

Each of us who participate in this Conference will be involved in a workshop where we will try to define through concrete actions what it means to teach art in an environment where we want to preserve cultural diversity. This very practical focus given to this

conference by the Finnish organizers will certainly help us to better understand what is the true meaning of diversity in the field of culture.

I would like to end this short introduction by thanking the organizers once more for their hospitality and wishing all the participants to have interesting discussions, good work and the most pleasant stay in this beautiful Finland.

Thank you.