

## PROLOGUE

### Arts Education for Hope

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In February 2024 around 1000 culture and education stakeholders, including government ministers, policymakers, experts, NGOs as well as UN agencies, scholars and practitioners, gathered at the UNESCO World Conference on Culture and Arts Education in Abu Dhabi, to agree on a new global Framework for culture and arts education. The adoption of this global document marks a meaningful step in efforts to ensure that culture and arts education is appropriately developed and supported globally. As a side event WAAE- World Alliance for Arts Education, with other colleagues, organized a panel, where we discussed and presented the importance of monitoring of the implementation of such a valued document.

In October 2025, the UNESCO Implementation Guidance was presented at the 2025 Mondiacult event that took place in Barcelona. This global Framework outlines commitments such as prioritizing culture and arts education in teacher training, emphasizing local and indigenous cultures and heritage in the classroom, and recognizing the contribution of artistic and cultural skills to the professional world. The Framework is an advocacy and action document towards the development and inclusion of art, arts education and culture in world schools and institutions.

UNESCO believes the Framework will be a tool for Member States, amongst my country, Serbia, to shape integrated strategies and policies that anchor the cultural dimension in educational systems and support them to invest in

nurturing skills and competencies, notably through culture and arts, that respond to contemporary needs and opportunities.

At the Conference in Abu Dhabi, Portugal's Education Minister, João Marques da Costa, began his input with a critical question: why do still have to justify the need for arts and cultural education when we don't do the same for science physics or mathematics? The idea that we need a Framework to value the role of culture and arts is a reflection of where our humanity is at the moment. But still, this Framework is a useful tool for advocacy. What's equally important is implementing it into public policies and grassroot action, each defined by their specific context.

The Implementation Guide also has many good examples of practices around the world, as well as "Recommendations for policy-makers" and "Tips for Practitioners".

But documents such as these are not the only hard copies that influence, change or advocate for our field, the field of arts education. All the effort that is invested in publishing, showing and showcasing important practices have impact and relevance as well. A great example is INVISIBILIDADES, the Ibero-American Journal of Research in Education, Culture and Arts, published by APECV, our colleagues from Portugal. Teresa Torres de Eça, one of the Co-Editors of the journal, has been and is for many years one of the most significant figures in our World Alliance for Arts Education. Hers are the inspiring words of "We will not bow down!", calling to resilience and action.

The Ibero-American Journal of Research in Education, Culture and Arts has consistently positioned itself as a platform for voices across diverse artistic and educational fields, art education, art and design education, visual literacy, arts and community, drama/theatre education; and the growing intersections between arts, culture, technology, and society.

Rooted in an ethos of accessibility, the journal guarantees open content for all issues, ensuring that its insights, innovations, and provocations circulate widely among educators, researchers, artists, and communities. In this spirit, the journal has cultivated a readership that spans formal educators, non-formal and community arts practitioners, and scholars who understand the arts as a vital site of inquiry, imagination, and social transformation.

This special issue, titled We Will Not Bow Down, emerges from the recognition that we are living through a moment of rupture—a moment in which the arts and arts education must respond boldly to the accelerating crises that shape our collective present. The phrase "We will not bow down" signals defiance, but also resilience: a refusal to submit to violence, inequity, erasure, and the forces that diminish human and more-than-human life. It invites contributors to reflect on how arts education, through its curricular theories, pedagogical innovations, artistic practices, and research methodologies, can resist destructive paradigms and instead nurture ethical, sustainable, and imaginative ways of living and learning, such as respect for the nature, eco base practices and also including ecofeminism as one of the themes of the works presented.

Contributions that are part of the Journal grapple these questions from multiple disciplinary, methodological, cultural, and geopolitical perspectives. We shed a light and are interested primarily in the work of those scholars and practitioners who are developing decolonial, posthuman, Indigenous, feminist, ecological, and speculative approaches to art, learning, and community engagement. These

perspectives collectively challenge the longstanding assumptions embedded in Western and Eurocentric educational structures. They invite us to rethink the very foundations of teaching and learning: What counts as knowledge? Who is authorized to teach? What forms of artistic or embodied experience are legitimate? How do we build intergenerational, interspecies, and transdisciplinary alliances that extend beyond human exceptionalism?

Every 27th of November we in the International Drama/Theatre and Education Association celebrate the Day of Drama/Theatre Education, or more popularly said: IDEA Day. This year it was the 18th time we celebrated it ever since Tintti Karppinen, our colleague from Finland proposed it should be celebrated. Themes for the IDEA Day celebration have changed over the years. This year, the year when we find ourselves in confusion about the darkness and destruction that seems to prevail in the world, we have decided to have the theme of "Drama/Theatre for Hope" as the main focus of 2025 IDEA Day.

I would like to share some of my thoughts from this years IDEA DAY message. For me the sub-theme of the IDEA Day is "Hope in Action". Just being and hoping in these radical times is not enough. We are not in the position to sit and wait for better times to come, for things to resolve by themselves.

Rebecca Sonlit writes that hope is an embrace of the unknown and the unknowable and also an axe you break down doors with in an emergency (Sonlit, 2016). We are in the times of "radical hope" as explained by Jonathan Lear. Radical hope means grounding ourselves in the possibilities and making proactive efforts to transform them into promise. It is believing that there are ways to move forward, to survive, resist, and prevail, without knowing exactly where we will be when we arrive (Lear, 2008).

The work we do, in the field of arts education implies actually that, reimagining the future, recreating the world and ourselves in every class, project, through every process.

Through our work we present ourselves and our essence in the world. We have the possibility to transform in this process, and by transforming ourselves we transform the world.

I believe that we are capable of making this effort, of opening this possibility of casting the light on us, making us visible, the goodness and hope we bring with what we do, also bringing the light with us, the light of hope and change. Also, through the journal we are presenting in these occasions. We must change the paradigm of being in the margin to being in the center of education, life and humanity. What we bring are essential skills needed for us as humans to be able to sustain, survive and develop. We have the power of confronting all the dark issues of AI and digitalization, on the other hand embracing the good points it brings, by fighting for our wok that demands physical presence and embodied practices.

We must convince the world that by marginalizing us, it is marginalizing the possibility of wellbeing and inner growth, and diminishing the possibility of working on the "ecology of the soul". We do need to work on it as diligently as we work on ecology in the world around us. Our inner worlds are as fragile, and sometimes polluted, darkened by so many factors.

We must stop justifying ourself and accepting the reduced space we are offered, but take center stage and grasp for ourselves the deserved spot we must have, and deserve.

This resilience, strength, this way of continuing, must be expressed firmly and patiently for all to see. For this year's UNESCO International Week of Arts Education we decided to use strong words, just as we made the decision in our declarations not to ask any more, but to demand. And words have energy in themselves.

So, we will not bow down, as Teresa wrote, but continue to create hope in action, in every class, every workshop, every time we do our work in drama/theatre, music, dance, visual art education.

We must not be afraid to shed light and get involved in the darkest of places, hoping that one day our role as arts educators and artists will not be just to "clean up the mess", and work on reconciliation, healing, overcoming trauma through art, creating bridges and connections where they have been torn by conflict, but will be there first of all for the prevention of all this tragedy that is happening in the world.

As we see injustice prevailing, human values diminished, we also see the rising of activism, of citizens, people entering the streets as a new space for expressing. In my country there is a constant succession of revolt and protests on the streets led by young people for over a year. This brings hope, hope for the future.

I invite you not only to read the articles within this issue, but to join a broader conversation about the role of the arts in shaping just, resilient, and hopeful futures. This journal invites educators, artists, researchers, and community practitioners to reflect on how we might collectively refuse the narratives of inevitability that accompany crisis. It encourages us to imagine education as an ethical, relational, and creative endeavor—one capable of responding to the unpredictability of the world not with despair, but with critical and radical hope and steadfast refusal.

To say "We will not bow down" is to affirm agency in the face of adversity; to hold onto the possibility of transformation; and to recognize the arts as essential to both survival and liberation. We hope that the articles in this special issue challenge, inspire, and sustain all those who believe that arts education remains a vital force in the creation of more just and imaginative worlds.

And for the end, just to add:

We will not bow down, but create hope in action.

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