



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Message from Audrey Azoulay,

Director-General of UNESCO,

on the occasion of International Arts Education Week

25 – 31 May 2020

“After the earthquake in Haiti, many painters, musicians and poets emerged. We made the disaster into flowers, which we offered to the world.” With these poetic words, the Haitian-Canadian writer Dany Laferrière described the “creative explosion” that took place after the 2010 earthquake.

Today, the world is facing another tragedy, one that exposes our interdependence and fragility. And, once again, we are witnessing the incredible power of human creativity. Across the globe, the arts are proving to be a powerful antidote to confinement, an outlet to express feelings and, above all, one of the most universal ways to share, uplift and express solidarity.

Creativity builds the resilience we need in times of crisis. It has to be nurtured from the earliest age to unlock the imagination, awaken curiosity and develop appreciation for the richness of human talent and diversity. Education is the place where this starts.

In an unprecedented context where up to 91% of the world’s students are affected by school closures, more than 90% of museums have closed their doors, and artists around the world are unable to make ends meet, International Arts Education Week takes on special significance.

Everywhere, we have seen arts education programmes and activities nurture connections between people and communities. These initiatives sustaining learning during school closures are inspiring hope in the face of adversity, breaking a sense of isolation and helping learners develop self-awareness, resolve inner conflicts and heal from trauma and loss.

However, arts education is not only a means to deal with crisis situations. It contributes to socio-emotional well-being and improves learning outcomes. It is a catalyst for social and economic development. It is an important lever to awaken talents, which are essential to maintain and renew artistic creation, ensuring the sustainability of the creative sector. If given greater priority within education systems, arts education can be a formidable resource to open minds to the diversity of the world's cultural expressions, by creating generations of learners with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that are needed to build stronger, more sustainable and peaceful societies.

The pandemic has heightened awareness of the need to bring more socio-emotional and creative content into learning. UNESCO is already harnessing the power of education and culture to work hand-in-hand for physical, social and economic reconstruction, for example with its project to rebuild cultural and educational sites in Mosul. Through our Network of Associated Schools, which includes more than 11,500 institutions in 182 countries, we also encourage activities that reflect on global issues through the arts, from environmental protection to welcoming refugees. We also work to promote cultural diversity and integrate tangible and intangible cultural heritage into education, encouraging appreciation of our shared humanity.

International Arts Education Week is an opportunity to promote learning with and through the arts to improve the quality and relevance of our education systems, nurture creative thinking and resilience.

UNESCO – as the only United Nations agency with a core mandate encompassing culture, heritage, arts, creativity and education – is committed to joining forces with its Member States to step up cooperation, mobilizing civil society, educators and arts professionals to fully harness the potential of both culture and education.

On this day, I call upon everyone to join us in celebrating International Arts Education Week, so we can make this disaster into flowers, to offer to the world.