

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by
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(UNESCO)

At the European Summit on Education in the Arts

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Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to host at UNESCO today this European Summit on Education in the Arts. As you all know, UNESCO's primary mission is to develop education in the broad sense of the term. Education in the arts, however, must not figure as its poor relation. On the contrary, it should be an essential component of the learning process.

So the holding of a Summit of this kind under the patronage of Mr Jacques Chirac, President of the French Republic, cannot but be gratifying to me. I thank him for the very stimulating discussion he has launched on this important issue where much is at stake.

France has just decided to widen access to art subjects considerably at all educational levels as from the next academic year, and we are delighted by such an initiative.

My thanks also go, of course, to Mr Alain Casabona, tireless advocate of the cause of education in the arts in France, for his competence and unfailing commitment to the organization of this Summit.

I also thank the group PROMODES and the group IGS (Ingénierie Graphisme Services), our partners in the holding of this Summit. It is highly significant and promising that partners from the private sector have entered this field, and I sincerely hope that the firms which have already taken an interest in this issue will develop their corporate sponsorship still further in the future.

Education in the arts, as shown by the presence of so many of you, is not the concern of teachers alone. Although the latter play a leading role in this respect, all the social forces involved must be mobilized severally so that education in the arts may take its rightful place in the learning process: the artists of course (and many of them have answered this appeal today), the non-governmental organizations, the associations, the unions, and all those who in some capacity or other are concerned with the young and are endeavouring to prepare them as harmoniously as possible to take in hand the destinies of the world of tomorrow.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This meeting is a timely response to a topical concern. The fresh attempts being made throughout Europe to promote education in the arts are indicative of the renewed interest the role of creativity in the learning process.

In view of the scale of the social demand for a genuine education in the arts, the pooling of ideas and examples of best practices assume particular importance. Why is such a need being expressed today?

Because we sense the limits of a rigid hierarchy in education systems of so-called "core" subjects, on the one hand, and "optional" subjects on the other. Because we feel the constraints of a system that is tending towards increasingly early and increasingly narrow specialization.

Because we are suffering from the effects of a technocratic approach to the aims of education, an approach which produces high-tech professionals desperately lacking in creativity.

Paradoxically, however, we are living in a period very rich in creativity. Present-day society, with its increasing complexity, more than ever demands interdisciplinarity, creativity and imagination. With the emergence of the new information technologies, especially multimedia, unprecedented combinations of texts, images, music and movement have become available.

We are living, in fact, at a time when the art component plays a key role for everyone from infancy onwards. It is up to us to find means of making sure that the young generations do not become passive consumers of music or other forms of art. We must provide them with means of expressing themselves through active, creative and collective participation in the arts. It is for the school – and society as a whole – to convince them that a knowledge of the arts is just as important as a knowledge of other subjects.

If education in the arts is to be taken back into the fold of the core subjects, it will have to invent new methods, contemplate new strategies, seek new partners. I said “be taken back into the fold of the core subjects”, for let us not forget that art was for centuries at the heart of the education systems of many societies. What civilization, for instance, has not given poetry a central place in the learning process at some time in its history?

If the learning society of the twenty-first century wants to create a flourishing civilization, it will have to reinvent education in the arts. For even in a society based on advanced technologies – I would be tempted to say **above all** in such a society – music, dance, the visual arts, theatre and drama, will continue to play the fundamental role they have played since the dawn of time: they mirror the human soul.

The famous Russian writer Anton Chekhov once wrote in a letter to a friend, “He who desires nothing, who hopes for nothing, and who fears nothing cannot be an artist”. One might add that, without the arts, our desires, our hopes and fears, could never be fully expressed. Emotions, spirituality, aesthetics, ideas and ideals could not assume their true proportions.

Without imagination and creativity, we shall never attain the mutual understanding and harmony required in this multicultural world. Art in all its forms is, and must remain, the ideal vector for grasping and understanding cultural diversity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you most sincerely for the commitment you have shown to this cause by your presence, and I wish you every success in your work. I can already assure you of UNESCO’s unreserved support for any initiative that will contribute to the promotion of education in the arts around the world.