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Conference reports

Betty Giannouli and Nassia Choleva

A. Harmonious coexistence of arts, nature, technology and education World Alliance for Arts Education Summit

The World Alliance for Arts Education

In 2010, international arts in education associations realised that by joining forces they could strengthen their voice in advocating for the place of arts in education at the policy-making level, both internationally and locally. Since then, they have been working together to create the conditions for open dialogue and joint action, such as hosting relevant panels at their conferences and issuing joint manifestos or advocacy texts. The World Alliance for Arts Education (WAAE) was founded by the International Drama/Theatre and Education Association (IDEA), the International Society for Music Education (ISME), the International Society for Education through Art (InSEA) and the World Dance Alliance (WDA). WAAE maintains close ties with UNESCO as they engage in dialogue on issues concerning arts in education. The chairmanship, currently held by IDEA President Sanja Krsmanović Tasić, rotates between organisations. The main event of the WAAE is the world summit, which is held in a different country each time.

The event

So this year, the 10th International Conference of the World Alliance for Arts Education took place in Athens on 17–19 October, under the title: Arts, Nature, Technology, Education: Harmony in Unity. Through concrete examples of research, artistic and educational practice, the aim was to explore how to create a transformative learning and teaching environment in diverse settings: at all levels of education, in the community, in health-enhancing the whole human experience and the shaping of intercultural practices and interventions.

The conference was organised and hosted by the Department of Music Studies and the Department of Theatre Studies of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. This major undertaking was actively supported by many other departments of

the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, as well as organisations such as the Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network. Representatives of the organising bodies spoke at the opening of the conference, which ended with a welcome from WAAE President Sanja Krsmanović Tasić, who directly linked the development of arts in education to the political will and economic decisions made worldwide in relation to educational policies. Artists, teachers, academics, researchers, scholars from 33 countries and over 55 universities, as well as representatives of international multicultural, educational and interdisciplinary organisations gathered in the very welcoming and pleasant space of the Modern Greek Language Teaching Centre. Special mention should be made of the Greek Sign Language interpretation, which contributed to the effective and inclusive organisation of the conference.

The programme

The very rich conference programme included a wide range of activities: keynote speeches, announcements and papers, research findings, events and short performances, poster presentations, workshops and panel discussions.

Keynote speeches and key ideas

The key themes implied by the title set the tone and provided creative links at all levels of the conference. The opening keynote speech was delivered by Cecily O'Neill, Professor Emeritus of Ohio University, an iconic figure in the field of drama education. Ms O'Neill, one of the founders of the use of theatre/drama in education and part of its living history, honoured the conference and our country with her presentation entitled "Makers of the Future". The following day, Professor Rhoda Bernard from Berkeley College of Music addressed issues of universal access to the arts and education in her presentation

titled “Accessible Arts in Education: Personal, Philosophical, Political and Practical Perspectives of Arts in Education for Individuals with Disabilities”. In addition, actor and director Vasilis Koukalani, founder of the group “Guild of Laughter”, represented the writer and founder of the GRIPS Theatre in Berlin, Volker Ludwig, and spoke about the history, course and fundamental role that GRIPS has played in Germany for decades in a speech titled “The World is Full of Contradictions and Injustice: Theatre for Children in the 21st Century”.

Of key importance was the presence of UNESCO representative, Ke Leng, Programme Coordinator, Cultural Policies and Development Entity, Culture Sector, who delivered a keynote speech titled: “Multi-Stakeholder Engagement Towards Effective Delivery of Culture and Arts Education”. After presenting the “Framework for Culture and Arts Education”, launched by UNESCO earlier this year, which is based on the fundamental values of human rights and the philosophy of lifelong learning, Mr Leng underlined the importance of mapping the use of the arts in education in order to provide the appropriate background, with the support of UNESCO, to convince governments to implement the Framework. He stressed the need to collect measurable research data in order to make the case for the arts in education more convincing at the level of education policy. This is a parameter that will be at the heart of our next programmes or research projects.

However, his contribution to the WAAE Summit did not end with this central presentation. At a pre-determined time, the plenary of the conference was divided into sub-groups, according to the type of

arts they represented, in order to provide answers to the key questions raised by Mr. Leng:

- How can we ensure equal access to culture and the arts in education?
- How can we integrate the different knowledge systems?
- How can we use digital technologies and artificial intelligence responsibly?
- How can we improve the professional development of teachers/educators and cultural professionals?
- How can we promote lifelong learning?

These issues were addressed along three axes:

- a) Suggestions for implementation and ideas for actions to promote the visibility of the Framework (by individuals, institutions or international associations);
- b) What might be the challenges in implementing the UNESCO Framework in each country or institution? (e.g., lack of resources, insufficient training, resistance to change, insufficient support from leadership, etc.);
- c) Ideas for monitoring the implementation of the Framework for culture and the arts in member countries.

The groups deliberated, documented their ideas, opinions, concerns and proposals; their reports were presented in the next plenary session, with Mr Leng taking careful notes. The full reports will both constitute a WAAE Manifesto and a report text to be officially submitted to UNESCO to promote dialogue.



WAAE Summit ATHENS 2024

Parallel sessions: papers, panels, posters and workshops

The main part of the conference was the open parallel sessions with papers, workshops, posters and panels from the four WAEE member organisations, covering music, theatre, dance and visual arts, as well as interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary approaches. Of particular interest was the polysemy in theories, research and practices, as well as interdisciplinarity, such as the connection between mathematics and dance, but also other connections between the arts that promote innovative educational approaches. The section on the use of AI in education and the arts was very important, as this is a key issue whose parameters and possibilities are still little known, such as the responsibility of using and contributing to this field. Also of great interest were arts-based presentations, which involved the active participation of conference participants. Projects in schools, communities, research data, useful practices and methodologies, approaches that creatively combine environmental issues, different arts and technologies were also discussed.

Artistic events and performances

The programme included a wide variety of artistic events representing all the arts, as well as events that provided opportunities for communication between participants. Performances by students from

the education, music and theatre studies departments as a result of their work in arts courses illustrated the importance of the arts in education.

Afterword

The Summit organisers masterfully combined the diverse elements of the four-day event, maintaining a balance between different arts, sciences and spaces, theory, research and practice, different languages, approaches and perspectives. Pluralism, meaningful intercultural dialogue and shared intentions to promote the arts in education internationally were the elements with which we left the conference, full of inspiration and empowerment for our next steps.

The next important date for the international community is the International Conference “Theatre/Drama & Inclusive Education”, organised by the Hellenic Theatre/Drama & Education Network in Athens in March 2025. Endorsed by IDEA as an “IDEA Regional Conference”, it will mark the end of the project “Theatre Makes Politics” (Erasmus+, 2022–2025) and will celebrate the 10th anniversary of “it could be me – it could be you”, a project for raising awareness about human rights and refugees (2015–2025). The next meeting of IDEA members will take place in Ankara with a major conference in July 2027. The *Education & Theatre* journal will be there to report on what happens.



B. IDEA Europe Annual Meeting

The presence of many members of IDEA Europe associations at the WAAE World Summit provided a fitting occasion for the annual meeting of IDEA Europe to be held in Athens. The meeting, hosted at the School of Modern Greek Language of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, was attended by representatives of organisations from seven countries: Greece, Germany, Finland, Czech Republic, Romania, Estonia and Serbia. In addition, individual members of IDEA from Spain and Slovakia took part in the meeting, making a total of 17 participants.

As part of the objectives of the meeting, the representatives presented the main actions and developments regarding Theatre in Education in their countries. At the same time, the changing position of Theatre in Education in each country was discussed. Particular mention was made of the Czech Republic, where the introduction of a theatre curriculum in schools is being considered. Another important development is happening in Germany, where BVTs (Association for Theatre in Schools) is promoting the integration of theatre in the secondary school curriculum and its inclusion in the final examination. It is expected that this initiative will be extended to several German states. Unfortunately, no significant developments were reported in most of the countries represented, a common element being the limited presence of theatre in the educational process compared to music and the visual arts.

During the two-day meeting, particular emphasis was placed on the establishment of working groups to discuss the following issues:

1. WAAE Summit and the Athens Manifesto

They discussed the importance of the WAAE Summit and agreed that it was a well-structured event with a rich programme, including all the arts and important presentations and workshops. The positive outcome of the WAAE Summit, the Athens Manifesto, was emphasised, as well as the responsibility of IDEA Europe associations and members to help promote it.

2. Advocating for Theatre in Education

The promotion of Theatre in Education was identified as a priority. The main actions proposed include:

- **Webinars:** Focus on highlighting good practices and methods for using theatre in education.

- **Communication policy:** Promoting the importance of theatre and implementing artistic actions at a national level.

3. Academic education and training

The need to strengthen academic education in Theatre in Education and in-service teacher training in theatre/drama was highlighted.

4. Environmental sustainability

A webinar was proposed to inform and explore sustainable practices and their relation to theatre, both in the context of courses and in wider educational programmes.

Members of the meeting focused on proposals for specific actions and international programmes in which their institutions already have experience and which could strengthen European cooperation. More specifically:

- A programme on gender inequalities in primary and secondary education, including programmes for teachers to recognise and address gender-related issues.
- The organisation of a conference on theatre/drama that will create a framework for dialogue between experts in the field, focusing on the objectives set out in the UNESCO texts on the protection of the arts.
- An awareness-raising programme on racism and xenophobia, to be implemented at European level, with the aim of combating stereotypes and producing an activity guide for inclusive education through interdisciplinary methods in the educational process.

The meeting concluded with a commitment to strengthen the cooperation between IDEA members in Europe and to promote theatre as a key tool for educational and social empowerment. The members will continue to communicate and take initiatives until the next IDEA Europe meeting, to be held in Romania in October 2025.