

## **Creating a Global Culture of Peace**

Ashfaq Ishaq

---

A paper prepared for Culture and International History Conference at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, Frankfurt on December 19-21, 2005

At the United Nations World Summit in New York in September 2005, the world's leaders expressed their determination to "establish a just and lasting peace all over the world" and committed themselves to "promoting education for peace and human development."<sup>1</sup> These statements remind us that the attainment of world peace continues to hold prominence on the global agenda.

The International Child Art Foundation (ICAF) endeavors to create peace, utilizing the power of the arts to develop the innate creativity and intrinsic empathy of children. By solidifying gains in creativity and leadership skills, ICAF lays the foundation for a global culture of peace for the next generation. This paper describes the approach in the light of ICAF's global programs and international events.

### **Focus on children**

One needn't be a student of history to know that our past leaders have failed to translate peaceful aspirations into reality. Current interest in root causes of conflict rightly addresses contributing factors such as economic disparity, civil grievances, dispute over resources, or competing ideologies. But part of our failing is that we are late to identify and support agents of change. As Mahatma Gandhi forewarned: "If we are to teach real peace in this world, and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with the children." In today's globalized world it has become essential that children maximize their creative potential to achieve individual and societal benefits.

### **Innate creativity**

The influence of certain developmental stages in the creative and imaginative lives of children and adults is well documented in the creativity literature. Within this body of data, a so-called "fourth grade slump" has been evidenced across cultures by the "father of creativity" E. Paul Torrance (1968). Briefly, these data indicate that when children begin school, their level of creativity is evident and often flourishing. By the time they reach the fourth grade however, they are more conforming, less likely to take risks, and less playful or spontaneous. This trend in behavior continues throughout the school years and into adulthood.

Psychologist Mark Runco (1999) in the Encyclopedia of Creativity has noted that the 4<sup>th</sup> grade slump can relate to maturational processes or to an emphasis on conforming behavior, but in either case it can be overcome. David Bohm and F. David Peat (2000) have called for a general creative surge in all areas of life. For these scientists, creativity is a major need of each human being; when thwarted, civilized society loses a defense against debasing and destructive forces.

---

<sup>1</sup> 2005 World Summit Outcome (final document) [www.un.org/summit2005](http://www.un.org/summit2005).

### **Intrinsic empathy**

Nurturing the innate creativity of children is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for a culture of peace. The complexity of local and global issues requires cooperative problem-solving, drawing on viable solutions. To be viable, however, solutions must respectfully and transparently address competing equities in a search for common ground and compromise. Individuals who demonstrate empathy are therefore more capable problem-solvers and leaders.

Empathy is the ability to understand and enter the feelings, thoughts and motives of another; it does not imply acceptance or agreement, or losing oneself to become another, but rather identifying with and understanding another's reasons and reactions. Jones (1990) provides a research-based definition of the successful learner whose major attributes include being empathetic, while Gallo (1989) argues similarly that empathy fosters both creative and critical thinking.

### **Power of the arts**

Art has a broader function in defining us and modifying our views of ourselves and our societies. According to cognitive neurobiologist Semir Zeki (2001), "the acquisition of knowledge by registering the constant and essential characteristics of objects is the primordial function of the visual brain. It is also the primordial function of art. That is why many great philosophers concerned with the problem of knowledge, from Plato onward, have devoted large parts of their work to discussion of art."

Children's innate creativity is a provenance of human achievement. Although scientific understanding of creativity is far from complete, researchers claim that a child who is exposed to the arts has the potential to become a more creative, imaginative, expressive, confident, self-reliant and critically thinking individual. E.E. Scope (1999) suggests that it is possible to enhance children's creative skills through art-based programs. Prominent educators like Howard Gardner (1999) and Sir Ken Robinson (2001) view the fostering of creativity through the arts as a key component in an educational renaissance.

Through the arts, children can be introduced to the world while perceptions are forming, and before generational grievances harden negative attitudes toward those who are different.<sup>2</sup> The arts can then become a key component in a moral-cognitive approach to education. According to art educator Candace Stout (1999), "the arts, with their inextricable ties to imagination, have the capacity to provide an unlimited source of possibilities for connecting self to other and for creating a disposition for sympathetic awareness." Such awareness promotes peer-to-peer learning and a spirit of cooperation.

### **The Arts Olympiad**

The International Child Art Foundation (ICAF) employs the power of the arts to heal, inspire, and unify children across the globe. The ICAF mission is to prepare children for a creative and cooperative future. The Arts Olympiad, a free global program, is ICAF's flagship initiative. The program starts with free lesson plans in classrooms and leads to school art competitions, local and national exhibitions, regional events and an international festival.

---

<sup>2</sup> Hahn (1980) cites research that indicates that students' attitudes towards foreign cultures are more positive when similarities are stressed rather than differences.

The Third Arts Olympiad (2005-2008) integrates art, sport and technology for children's holistic development. The lesson plan promotes the novel concept of the "artist-athlete." The art competition's theme, My Favorite Sport, encourages young athletes to be creative and young artists to picture themselves enjoying physical activities. Children can paint or draw their favorite sport, or create digital art about it using available software.

Combining art and sport can create a dynamic synergy, as noted by Nobel Laureate Nelson R. Mandela: "Art and sport have the powers to change the world, the power to inspire, the power to unite people in a way that little else can. Art and sport speak to people in a language they understand. Art and sport can create hope where there was once only despair. They are instruments for peace, even more powerful than governments."

### **Global peace building**

The Arts Olympiad is based on ICAF's "Peace Through Art Methodology" developed in collaboration with the Center for the Study of Mind and Human Interaction at the University of Virginia and other leading experts. Global peace education elements of the Arts Olympiad are outlined below:

1. **Community cohesion:** The Arts Olympiad Lesson Plan is designed for a typical classroom comprised of students interested in art, sport and/or technology. Each group is urged to examine the motivation and objectives of the other, and discuss the application of the Olympic ideals of tolerance and cooperation. The students create art about their favorite sport, and then help their teachers in the selection of the finalist, which enhances their self-confidence, objectivity and visual aesthetics.

*[Example: The Israeli Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport organized a conference at the Teachers Sports Institute to introduce the Arts Olympiad to art and sports inspectors and instructors representing different regions in Israel. The conference program included a power-point presentation, lectures on art and sport in history, art and sport curricula, and brainstorming in order to suggest integrative activities in the classroom. Dr. Naomi Jaffe, National Superintendent for Art & Theater Studies for the Ministry, informed ICAF that by October 2005 already 200 schools were participating in the Israeli Arts Olympiad.]*

2. **Nation building:** A national children's event brings together young people from every district or region for a 3-4 day period during which they develop bonds through shared interests in art, sport and technology. Art and sport activities alleviate tension while digital technology promotes communication. The children collectively select the national finalists using criteria that recognize not only artistic talent, but abilities in other creative fields – oration, writing, theater, music, etc. – as well as academic excellence and emotional intelligence, to identify creative and empathetic children who have regional and global leadership potential.

*[Example: The Croatian government has setup a National Committee for the Croatian Arts Olympiad, which is chaired by Dr. Izet Aganović, Adviser to the President, and comprised of representatives of the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, the UNESCO Commission, and the National Olympic Committee. The Arts Olympiad Committee is planning to host a national event in Zagreb in the spring of 2006.]*

3. Regional identity: National finalists from each continent come together at five-day regional festivals organized by ICAF and its partners. The festival objective is to provide children a sense of regional identity and to help diffuse nationalistic zeal in order to facilitate regional union or integration. The children play regional sports and work together on art and digital projects. Their teachers and parents initiate bilateral “neighbor-our-friend” programs to ease tensions between countries that have common borders.

*[Example: ICAF’s affiliate in Germany, ICAF eV, and Olympia Park GmbH are hosting the European Children’s Festival at the Olympia Park in Munich right before the 2006 FIFA World Cup. ICAF eV is also organizing the First International Cultural Figurines and Children’s Puppets Exhibition on 26 May to 9 June, 2006 at Galeria Kaufhof am Marienplatz, showcasing how children interpret and share their culture to gain others’ understanding.]*

4. Global understanding: The Arts Olympiad culminates in an international celebration, traditionally held on the National Mall in Washington, DC. The world’s premier event for children, the festival gives voice to children on issues and interests of common concern. Children participate in workshops on developing empathy, sustaining creativity, and leadership development, and connect with current leaders. They display their musical, theatrical and debating talents at the ‘world stage’ where impromptu performances are encouraged. Equipped with a repertoire of new skills, universal values and newfound confidence, they begin preparations for global leadership roles.

*[Example: The World Children’s Festival to be held in June 2007, will welcome delegates from every U.S. state and nearly 100 countries. The weeklong festival will explore ways of integrating art, sport and technology as a basis for individual and societal benefits. ICAF’s Education Partners, including UNESCO and the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, arrange workshops for children or adults.]*

The arts and creative opportunities provided by ICAF transform the way children learn and explore the world around them. Being creative also helps them adapt and respond to a rapidly changing world. Global engagement through the Arts Olympiad enhances an individual’s prospects in a global economy where competition for jobs and entrepreneurial success is becoming more intense. Global awareness and empathy leads to the development of multicultural competencies that help unite communities. Global understanding promotes acceptance of universal values and the capacity to envision alternative and more hopeful futures.<sup>3</sup>

Buttressing these benefits is the Arts Olympiad’s track record of positive results in the training of teachers and parents. Through their participation in the program, teachers arrange art exchanges with schools in other countries and in the process enhance their own understanding. Parents, too, become involved, often sharing with and encouraging their children in their work. Workshops on how to sustain a child’s innate creativity and intrinsic empathy are organized at ICAF’s festivals for teachers and parents.

---

<sup>3</sup> By disseminating the children’s artworks through festival properties and licensing agreements, ICAF shares with a world beset by poverty, conflict and lack of opportunity the hope in a child’s eye.

## Conclusion

The Arts Olympiad is the world's largest and most prestigious initiative for children ages 8 to 12. More than three million children (one million in China alone) are expected to participate in the Third Arts Olympiad. Yet this is just the tip of the iceberg. ICAF must expand its outreach to more of the 660 million children who fall in the 8-to-12 age group. ICAF must deepen its impact by reaching more disadvantaged children who never have the opportunity to create art unless presented with the Arts Olympiad experience. ICAF is sowing the seeds for a culture of peace to blossom. Then, one day the children would lead us into a better and safer world.

---

## References

- Bohm, D., and Peat, F. D, (2000). *Science, order, and creativity*. Routledge, Oxford, second edition.
- Gallo, D. (1989). Educating for empathy, reason and imagination. *Journal of Creative Behavior* 23, 98-115
- Gardner, H. (1999). *Art education and human development*. Getty Center for Education in the Arts, Santa Monica, California.
- Hahn, S.L. (1980). Let's try a positive approach. *Foreign Language Annals* 13, 417-417.
- Jones, B.F. (1990). The new definition of learning: the first step to school reform. *In Restructuring to promote learning in America's schools*. A guidebook. North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, Elmhurst, Illinois.
- Robinson, K. (2001). *Out of our minds: learning to be creative*. Capstone, West Sussex.
- Runco, M. A. (1999). Fourth grade slump. In Runco, M.A., and Pritzker, S. R. *The encyclopedia of creativity 1*, 743-44. Academic Press, San Diego.
- Scope, E.E. (1999). A meta-analysis of research on creativity: the effects of instructional variable. Unpublished dissertation, Fordham University.
- Sharp, C. (2001). Developing young children's creativity through the arts: what does research have to offer? National Foundation for Educational Research, London.
- Stout, C.J. (1999). The art of empathy: teaching students to care. *The Journal of Art Education* 52, 2, 21-34.
- Torrance, E. P. (1968). A longitudinal examination of the 4<sup>th</sup> grade slump in creativity." *Gifted Child Quarterly* 12, 195-197.
- Zeki, Semir (2001). Essays on science and society: artistic creativity and the brain. *Science* 293, 51-52.