**The Seoul Agenda Celebrates an Anniversary**

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This year marks the fifth anniversary of the unanimous endorsement of the *Seoul Agenda: Goals for the development of arts education* at the 36th Session of the General Conference of UNESCO. This was a remarkable accomplishment for the field of arts education and a tribute to the determined efforts of the Republic of Korea, fulfilling a commitment it made at the 2nd UNESCO World Conference on Arts Education held in Seoul the previous year (2010). An important objective of the world conference was to produce an action plan for arts education that could be applied internationally and that, eventually, could be measured through empirical methods. The *Seoul Agenda* was the hoped-for plan that emerged from the deliberations. As General Rapporteur, it was my honour to be responsible for constructing this action plan, taking care to reflect the exemplary research and practices presented at the Conference, working under the guidance of a distinguished International Advisory Committee and ably supported by UNESCO staff.

The *Seoul Agenda* is built around three goals, each of which is supported by a number of strategies and action items. The first goal is to make arts education accessible to all, with the ultimate purpose of improving education generally. The second is to improve the quality of arts education. The third goal is to apply arts education to help solve social and cultural problems facing the world.

Inspired by the pivotal event in Seoul and motivated by UNESCO’s endorsement of the action plan, an international group of researchers came together for the purpose of promoting high quality research in all aspects of arts education (formal, non-formal and informal). In addition to providing a forum in which to disseminate research, debate quality of research and showcase exemplary practices, this new organization (the International Network for Research in Arts Education – INRAE) made itself accountable for monitoring implementation of the *Seoul Agenda*.

But how was such a global monitoring project to be organized within the limited resources of the research community. Much study and debate over a period of years was needed before a serious attempt could be made. INRAE has held 3 international symposia – 2 in Germany and 1 in Hong Kong – along with a number of planning meetings which will be described below. A further meeting is scheduled for June of this year, to take place in Spain.

Along the way, researchers from many countries have shared ideas about what practices should be monitored, what indicators might be used to determine the application of these practices, how data could be collected (by whom and by what means) and, of course, how the data might be analyzed to produce a picture reflecting the reality of arts education philosophies, policies and activities from a global perspective.

Over the past three years, these important discussions have begun to yield concrete results as members of the INRAE community of scholars have worked to develop instruments that could be applied to monitoring arts education. An initial step was taken in 2013 when Susanne Keuchel designed and tested an arts education development index with the intention of following an “international comparative empirical research approach.”[[1]](#endnote-1) This survey asked a small, representative sample of experts to report on the levels of access to arts education and approaches taken in their own countries. It was concluded that the pre-test revealed problems with the design of the questionnaire and necessary modifications of the model were suggested.

With insights from this pre-test in mind, INRAE held a consultative workshop with representatives of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics in Montreal, Canada, in March of 2014, where methodological issues related to gathering data from many countries were discussed. The connection with the UNESCO Institute for Statistics has been maintained as a representative of the Institute took part in a subsequent meeting held in Utrecht, the Netherlands in February of 2015 (the International Expert Meeting on Monitoring National Arts Education). This symposium addressed some of the methodological questions in depth.

At a subsequent meeting of researchers also held in 2015 in Genshagen, Germany, the research team agreed to follow two, complementary research streams. One, led by Susanne Keuchel, (Comparison of National Arts Education Systems – COMPAES), aims to continue work begun in the earlier pre-test with a view to finding appropriate ways of making comparisons between arts education systems in different countries. The other, involving Dr. Teunis IJdens , Prof. Dr. Eckart Liebau, Dr. Ernst Wagner and Prof. Dr. John Lievens, (Monitoring of National Arts Education Systems – MONAES), aims to engage a larger number of experts in each country and to enquire into a broad range of facts and understandings about arts education.

Since that time, the MONAES project has moved ahead with remarkable speed. At the beginning of February, 2016, after much consultation with representative experts, the first phase of data gathering was initiated. Having posted a questionnaire on-line and circulating a call for participation, the project team received 300 responses from experts in 55 countries addressing questions related to their personal ideas and definitions of arts education, as well as their thoughts about issues facing the field. As I write this article, the data is being analyzed and, simultaneously, the second phase – looking into a great many specifics about arts education in each country – has reached the final stages of consultation before being launched.[[2]](#endnote-2)

So, 2016 offers us an opportunity not only to look back with pleasure on the success achieved in producing the *Seoul Agenda* and gaining unanimous endorsement from UNESCO’s General Conference. It is also a time to look forward to future success as the means are found to monitor the implementation of this important action plan around the world.

1. Keuchel, Susanne (2014) Arts Education Development Index (AEDI) – A comparative international empirical research approach in arts education. In O’Farrell, Larry, Schonmann, Shifra and Wagner, Ernst (Eds.) *International Yearbook for Research in Arts Education (Vol. 2)*, Münster: Waxmann (42-51). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. When the questionnaire is ready for expert input, KACES will be informed so that readers of this newsletter will be able to participate in the survey. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)