

## **A Culture of Peace: Art Education in Costa Rica**

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*This participation intends to answer the following questions provided by the Committee.*

### **1. What initiatives are being implemented in your country to promote a culture of peace?**

A culture of peace has been promoted in Costa Rica at all levels and dimensions of life, including social justice, intercultural understanding, human rights, and gender equality. For example, in 1948, Costa Rica became the first country in the world to constitutionally abolish the army; and in 1986, Oscar Arias was awarded a Nobel Peace prize for his efforts in addressing the conflict that engulfed Central America during the 1980's.

Education has played a key role to enhance the knowledge and skills essential to a holistic culture of peace in Costa Rica. The reason behind this inspiring scenario is that the Ministry of Public Education has consistently developed effective peace-related curricula for all levels of formal schooling. These philosophical principles have been legally supported since 1997 with *The Alternative Conflict Resolution and Encouragement of Social Peace Law* (Sistema Costarricense de Información Jurídica, 1997), which states the following (*personal translation in English*):

#### **Article 1 – Peace Education**

Every person has the right to a proper peace education program at his or her elementary school and high school. These education institutions are required to teach their students the concept of peace as well as to provide the required tools to achieve it.

The Higher Education Council will also implement a series of programs that will encourage dialogue, negotiation, mediation, conciliation, and similar processes that may facilitate conflict resolution.

Education should encourage peace and human rights.

## **2. Of the peace initiatives you discussed, what do you consider your top priority?**

From the previous peace education initiatives, the one I consider top priority to discuss today is concerned within art education, specifically those practices implemented in the public and private sectors of the school communities in Costa Rica.

In the public sector, the Ministry of Public Education (MEP) recently established a new visual arts framework for the elementary and high school (Ministerio de Educación Pública de la República, 2013). This new framework was developed within an interdisciplinary context and is known as the Ethics, Aesthetics, and Citizenship Project. One of the key objectives of this project is to provide a peace education platform in which creative production may take place and may focus on themes engaged with nature and cultural communities.

In the private sector, many schools are engaged with the visual arts program of the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO). The IBO program was started in the mid 1960s by European diplomats and formed a partnership with UNESCO in 1996 to form a universal curriculum framework for peace education. The mission statement of this organization aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect. (IBO, 2014)

The public education systems of Costa Rica and the IBO provide a peace education platform in which creative production may take place, i.e. a curriculum framework that takes into account approaches in three different areas: goals that are developed within an ethical engagement with self, people, and nature; the construction of knowledge and development of skills as the result of the deliberation of ideas; and evaluation strategies that take into account formative assessments and continuous reflective practices.

## **3. How have programs/ initiatives impacted student achievement, student behavior and the overall school culture?**

An integrated art peace curriculum consists of a radically different way of thinking about the teaching and learning process. Within this context, my personal experience has involved shifting all aspects of the art curriculum towards a cooperative environment in order to implement caring, respectful, and sharing practices at all times.

*Wearable Arts* is one program that I've helped coordinate for several years at the European School in Costa Rica and I consider that this initiative has impacted student achievement, student behavior, and the overall school culture. The concept of *Wearable Arts* originated in New Zealand and consisted of a type of fashion show or catwalk of artists displaying their body art (artwork represented on a person's body.) Once a year, students at the European School decorate their bodies with their hand made costumes and also incorporate a series of movements and rhythms of music to their performance.

*Wearable Arts* at the European School reflects a series of artworks that evolve around a central theme. For example, last year our coordinating committee selected the theme of "water" because it was UNESCO's International Year of Water Cooperation (2013) so all the art interpretations evolved around the topics of rainbows, rivers, and rainforests.

One of the most important aspects of *Wearable Arts* is the collective approach that has been incorporated into this activity. Years ago, one of my first steps was to develop the concept that each artwork would actually be represented by a group of students performing together. Within this collective approach, I was also able to establish the tradition of having teachers team up and work with different age groups, so that one age level may work together with a different age level. Teachers begin the entire process by organizing picnics and games in order to get to know each other; then they engage in their planning and performance activities, and close with reflective thoughts.

#### **4. As members of the Curriculum of Hope for a Peaceful World Committee, we believe in the hope of the future. Where there is hope there are possibilities.**

##### **4.1 What are the obstacles?**

The obstacles in any an art peace program is to develop **competitive** practices within the teaching/learning environment, i.e. situations in which students work against each other to achieve a goal that only a few can attain. Some examples of these practices are the following:

- Competition in **Skills**: who may draw, paint, or carve better than others.
- Competition in **Knowledge**: who may know more facts about art history than others.
- Competition in **Creativity**: who may come up with more creative ideas than others.
- Competition in **Time**: who can work faster than others.
- Competition in **Artworks**: who can create more artworks than others.
- Competition for **Awards**: who deserves a prize instead of others.

By providing a competitive environment, the art classroom is divided into “successful students” who perceive that they can obtain their goals, if and only if, the other students in the class fail to obtain their goals; and in “not successful students” who take it easy because they believe they don’t have a chance to succeed.

Why should students compete with others if their starting points of knowledge and skills are different? Can a society, culture, or community really afford to have members who are considered “losers”? Every student has the right to learn and to be measured by her/his own previous achievements and not by those of someone else.

##### **4.2 What do you see as the future of peace initiatives in your country? What do you see as your next possibilities?**

The future of the art peace education initiatives in Costa Rica should continue to develop **cooperative** practices within the learning environment in order to guarantee the success of all students. Cooperative learning is about acknowledging the intrinsic value of each student and her/his relevance within a group. By developing cooperative skills, all the students help, support, encourage, and applaud each other’s efforts while they develop their art activities. The entire group is held accountable for achieving the goals together, because each member is responsible for contributing his or her share of the work. With cooperative principals and methods, all students perceive that they are linked with each other, and work together in a way that one cannot succeed unless everyone succeeds.

## References

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