

6.5 Legitimization: The arts as universal educational good

“Arts Education programmes can help people to discover the variety of cultural expressions offered by the cultural industries and institutions, and to critically respond to them”, reads the → [UNESCO Roadmap for Arts Education](#), a lobbying paper for cultural mediation which is attracting attention in many parts of the world and bringing forth concrete effects on educational and cultural policies internationally. The same document points out that participating in the cultural life of the community and enjoying the arts are defined as universal human rights in the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights and thus must be secured for everyone. This legitimization strategy is based on an understanding of the arts as a universally valuable educational good. In this view, engaging with the arts is always beneficial for everyone, regardless of an individual’s interests, convictions, circumstances or objectives. Those who have not recognized this on their own should be → [brought to the arts](#) through cultural mediation. Since many people fall into this category – or so goes the argument – appropriate resources should be channelled to cultural mediation.

Historically, the idea that (high) culture is an educational good which is fundamentally beneficial for all people and is aimed at all people has its roots in the Enlightenment. One finds it articulated as early as in the mid 18th century, in the Friedrich Schiller’s texts on aesthetic education (→ [Schiller 1759](#)). At the start of the 20th century, this idea established itself (to no small extent through the efforts of reform pedagogy for the recognition of → [“musisch” education](#)) as a fixed component of the bourgeois concept of “Bildung”. It remains an influential legitimization for cultural mediation, and for the promotion of culture in general, which is still present and effective throughout Europe (and beyond, as the global presence of the UNESCO Roadmap for Arts Education cited above illustrates).

Examining the hypothesis that the arts per se are good for “humanity”, one cannot avoid objecting that it assumes the existence of a link, at least an implicit one, between cultural mediation and bourgeois and western values and is sometimes explicitly connected with nationalistic ideas. We find an illustrative example in a 2008 → [speech by German Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel](#), in which she said:

“Art and culture give us a sense of where we come from, where we feel at home and how our identity is composed. They document to a great

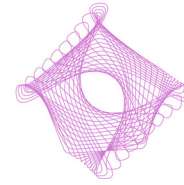
→ [UNESCO Roadmap for Arts Education](#) http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CLT/CLT/pdf/Seoul_Agenda_EN.pdf [22.2.2013]; see Resource Pool MFE060501.pdf

→ [brought to the arts](#) see Text 5.2

→ [Schiller 1759](#) full text version online <http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/3355/1> [13.4.2012]

→ [“musisch” education](#) see Glossary

→ [Angela Merkel's speech](#) <http://perso.ens-lyon.fr/adrien.barbaresi/corpora/BR/t/1368.html> [13.4.2012]; see Resource Pool MFE0605.pdf



degree that which makes us belong together and they promote cohesion within a society. This means that culture is the unifying bond of our Germany. Thus it is no coincidence that we speak of the 'Kulturnation' [cultural nation] of Germany."

Another point of criticism worthy of consideration points out that it is fundamentally condescending to decree that → engagement with the arts is good and important for everyone as a matter of principle, whether it is the state, politicians, experts of an educational elite or the society as a whole which does so.

→ engagement with the arts see Text 6.8