

## Editorial

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Nowadays there is a surging trend of using the terms “applied theatre” or “applied drama” as an addition to or replacement of “drama education” both overseas and in Hong Kong. As O’Connor (2009) describes, applied theatre is an umbrella term that defines theatre which operates beyond the traditional scope of western theatre forms. One feature of applied theatre is the blurring of boundaries between actors and spectators so that all participants become active theatre-makers, which differentiates it from conventional theatre making and performing (O’Connor, 2009). Besides participation that leads to effective practice, the narrative quality and the concern about social justice are also important features of applied drama (Nicholson, 2005).

The spectrum of papers in this issue has amalgamated the practice of applied theatre and drama education spanning across a wide range of age groups and cultural contexts: pre-schooling in Mainland China, primary schooling in Greece, secondary schooling in Hong Kong, university training as drama therapists in Hong Kong and adult learning as community groups in Norway. Among these drama and theatre applications, we insert a dialogic intervention of a general discussion of how applied drama and theatre is defined and conceptualized, from a Taiwan perspective. This combination and synthesis of different Asian/Chinese experiences together with European perspectives reflects our common concerns in the drama education world as well as the intertextual references of local knowledge. The Journal’s Asian focus, hence, never limits its global lookout which always serves as resources for reflection, enrichment, and self-improvement.

To kick start the discourse, Yun-wen Chen gives a comprehensive study on the definition and theoretical understanding of applied theatre based on the “betwixt and between” nature of drama. In tune with O’Connor, she points out that “applied theatre” is theatre being applied to social contexts other than the mainstream, traditional performative context. She then uses the reflections of researchers and her own observations in Taiwan to synthesize an evaluation of the effectiveness and artistry in applied theatre.

Jin-mei Zhang has somehow directly responded to Chen's notion of applied theatre by advocating the learning of drama more interactively than doing it in a traditional way which emphasizes performance. She starts the discussion with a Mainland China pre-school practice and lists the interactive classroom activities showing the process of imagination, expressiveness and decision-making exhibited by young children in drama.

Asterios Tsiaras gives us a Greek example of how the study of developing primary students' self-concept through drama is important for educators to resist policies that reduce the use of dramatic play in schools. This is indeed a universal claim that always serves as useful references for government bodies and funders to generate educational policies that insist on the expansion of drama curricula, and quantitative search like this helps to confirm the positive effect of drama on holistic personal development.

Stephen Ching-kiu Chan and Muriel Yuen-fun Law sincerely experimented the teaching of critical thinking in drama. It is an important educational endeavour with a context of understanding how Liberal Studies, the newly examined senior secondary school subject in the Hong Kong reformed system, could be implemented. The action research discussed the implications in the learning of writing cultural criticism "beyond the simplistic level", by achieving dialogic cultural communication in the forms of self-critique and social analysis.

The arm of applied theatre then extends into university. Tit-wing Lo and Wing-yee Ho lead us into the way of drama therapy by introducing how a group of postgraduate students in Hong Kong with professional training in social work and counseling are immersed in a course about counseling and psychodrama. According to Lo and Ho, in the method called "Action Therapy", the use of the "double" is an adaptation from Moreno's classical psychodrama in order to suit the passive cultural quality of Chinese clients. These participants are not just learners, but themselves also the clients to be counseled.

Finally, Tordis Landvik rounds up the narrative by showing an out-of-school experience from Norway which is also quite an interesting reference for us, looking at a community based theatre performance project. The project aims at letting participants use their historical understanding of the community to generate stories that look for meanings of cultural identities, specifically referring to the impact of industrialization

and formation of the town named Mosjøen. What could be more useful for Hong Kong drama artists and educators is Landvik's analytically narrative approach to tease out the artistic, pedagogical and therapeutic challenges, and the interplay among the three areas, in the creative and rehearsal process of the performance work.

The display of different applied theatre and drama practices in this issue is an attempt to weave an embroidered cloth of the possible applications of the human art of drama to Asia and beyond, covering a huge variety of age groups, where we hope to locate the jig saw pieces we still need in order to create a more beautiful picture.

## References

- O' Connor, P. (2009). Editorial. *RiDE: the Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 14 (4), 471-477.
- Nicholson, H. (2005). *Applied Drama: the Gift of Theatre*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.