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### **Drama Education & Policy: The Public Learning-scape**

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#### **Abstract**

This paper explores an overview of drama education policy in the light of arts education and cultural policy, their inter-relatedness and the overall health of the arts sector vis-à-vis policy formulation. In addition to Appadurai's five global scapes, a sixth scape, the learning-scape is proposed, one which is developed from a cultural policy that connects arts education in the formal education system *and* arts education provided by arts organisations as one *comprehensive* entity as opposed to their being disparate parts. By taking on Vidovich's (2001) modified policy cycle and the tripartite process of policy formulation, a triple policy type diagram is added to further comment on the complexities of policy making. A first set of questions is raised to investigate cultural policy. Some key issues in current drama/theatre education in Hong Kong are raised leading to a second set of questions specifically on drama education policy. The paper concludes with a cautionary note that policy for display, as opposed to a policy proper, should not be the direction taken for a city that has such prosperity.

*“The point is that simply being in the presence of art forms is not sufficient to occasion aesthetic experience or to change a life”*

Maxine Greene (2000:125)

### **Introduction**

Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai’s seminal work explores the disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy and proposes an elementary framework to analyse the relationship between five dimensions or “scapes” (1990) in the global cultural flow, scapes being “imagined worlds” that are fluid, irregular and “deeply perspectival constructs” (ibid.,296).

The “ethnoscape” is the shifting movement of people globally; the “mediascape” or images are narratives of unclear lines between reality and fiction; the “technoscape” or high-speed technology blurs and crosses boundaries; the “financescape” belies the complex flow of global capital and finally, the “ideoscape” is made up of changing political ideologies. The five together illustrate the spheres of influence that is globally consuming. Collectively, the scapes encapsulate people, narratives, technology, capital and ideologies, powerful characteristics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Hong Kong, with a population of seven million people today inhabiting approximately 1095 square kilometers, barely makes a full stop on the world map. Yet it possesses all five scapes like other advanced global cities with the financescape as the strongest force.

Except for a deep harbour, the only other natural resource for Hong Kong at its inception was a resilient and persevering people. The territory had a transient refugee population from China during its periods of instability in the 1950s and 60s. Political socialisation reduced opportunities for conflict by homogenising the refugees. This ensured the stability required for economic growth (Sweeting & Morris,1993). Stability met a

coloniser's needs as it did for the general masses who wanted to eke out a steady living. The psyche for economic prowess was born from colonialism hand in hand with the refugees' need for fast turnovers before they headed home again.

During the colonial era, apoliticisation was *de rigueur* for economic prosperity. Postiglione saw that the city "will have a strong tendency to shy away from significant reforms because of its long-standing economic success under the colonial government" (1992:32). Political eras influence the state of education in the production of policy text (Hodgson & Spours, 2006). This was reflected in Hong Kong's education policies (Sweeting & Morris, 1993). A key feature of education in the post-war period was the clear integration of economy and education. The chief concern of the predecessor to the Education Commission established in 1963 to oversee education policy was "how best to secure value for money" (Hong Kong Government, 1981:138). Over three decades on, the Education Commission Report 5 asserted that:

*. . . we see education spending as an investment . . . If resources are invested wisely within a well-managed education system, the social and economic returns for both individuals and the community can be substantial, as Hong Kong's history has shown (1992, p. 2).*

In the education reform policy of 2000, "learning for earning" (Coffield, 1999:493) was still paramount:

*The world is undergoing unprecedented changes, and Hong Kong is no exception. We are seeing substantial changes in the economic structure and the knowledge-based economy is here to stay. Hong Kong is facing tremendous changes posed by a globalized economy (Education Commission, 2000:3).*

In July 1997, China resumed sovereignty. Today, Hong Kong is a notable example of effectiveness and efficiency. In the last quarter of 2011, its GDP stood at US\$65,000m. Neoliberalism is the cornerstone of the city's existence. In 2012, the city is economically robust and quantitative attainment a key measure of status and success. The single-minded

pursuit of economic development in Hong Kong over decades defines the city's success on a linear, literal, tangible and quantitative trajectory. Speed means efficiency and effectiveness. Instant result is a much desired goal from making money to education. Victory is defined in speed and numbers. These modes of being have transformed our collective psyche and they shall be revisited in relations to policy issues. As with other global cities, Hong Kong is much enamoured of league tables. In education, Hong Kong is at the top of the programme for International Student Assessment<sup>1</sup> or PISA. On the arts front, cultural events too are increasingly gearing up for the Guinness Book of Records.

However, while Hong Kong is known worldwide for its fiscal strength, it is not regarded as a cultural metropolis although the estimates for 2011-2012 spending on arts and culture equalled 1% of total Government expenditure or US\$363m<sup>2</sup>, no mean figure. Despite innumerable arts happenings today, the cultural ecology is fragile. There is no proper cultural policy, let alone arts education and drama education policies. The kind of future in arts and culture is a key question for the incoming Government on July 1, 2012 headed by new Chief Executive, Leung Chun Ying. While the current ecology could have chugged along nonchalantly, two major changes would create tensions for the new Government, forcing it to review its cultural spending and literally, the state of the arts: the West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD) project and the possible announcement of the incumbent for the Secretary for Culture in the historical establishment of a Culture Bureau.

The WKCD is a 40-hectare cultural project of US\$2.78b which was dogged by rounds of difficulties in its conception and at birth, a change of CEOs within a year. It is currently in the master planning stage dominated by buildings concerns. The Culture Bureau is viewed cautiously by the arts community as either a triumph after 20 years of lobbying or a

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<sup>1</sup> PISA is a worldwide league table study by the OECD of 15-year-olds scholastic performance on mathematics, science and reading.

<sup>2</sup> Figure from the Home Affairs Bureau website

propaganda machine for nationalistic purposing. The jury is still out on the bureau's head as politics are played out between liberal and conservative factions for their preferred candidates.

The challenges thrown at the Government elect and consequential tensions are much more than the globally-eyed WKCD or the first minister of culture. The pressure comes from the need to formulate and implement a cultural policy proper for the first time ever.

This paper began with a brief overview of Hong Kong's prosperity and how education has been a fundamental constituent leading to a view that both are founded on the characteristics of single-mindedness, speed, literality and the overtly quantitative. This first section will now move on to cultural policy and an analysis of policy culminating in Vidovich's (2001) modified policy cycle in education policy research. I will then offer a parallel view of Vidovich's tripartite policy process with three policy types – cultural, arts education and drama education – before raising an initial set of questions at cultural policy level. In the second section of the paper, drama education is explored in the light of arts education, a lack of policies in both and the current situation. Policy is investigated in view of activism and wisdom-seeking while a second set of questions is delineated in relations to drama education and inter-connectivity with the other policy layers. This paper aims to provoke thought as the impending Culture Bureau is being created.

This paper also proposes a sixth draft scape, the "learning-scape" to Appadurai's (1990) five global scapes. The learning-scape is to be developed from a cultural policy that co-joins arts education in the formal education system *and* arts education provided through arts organisations as one *comprehensive* organic entity as opposed to their being disparate organisms as is generally regarded and practised here. For this journal, drama is the chosen art form although some of the points raised may apply equally to others. The learning-scape is structured as a series of three sets of evolving policy questions that need to be asked in the

formulation of a cultural policy and its inter-connectivity with the arts education and drama education policies. Due to length constraint, the focus is not on arts education policy analysis.

This article is written from my experience as an arts educator and as the past and current administrator of theatre organisations in Hong Kong. The key points are meant to be discussion initiatives and offer one among many possible views.

### **Definitions**

Drama and education collocates in multiple ways. In the drama teaching and learning systems, both formal as in the schooling system and informal as in extra-curricular activities in and outside of schools, there are a multitude of pedagogical approaches: drama education, drama-in-education, theatre-in-education, process drama, devised theatre, the list goes on. Drama education in this paper is defined as the general sense of learning through the mode of drama in the widest sense as text and performance.

Theatre education refers exclusively to drama education via professional theatre companies that operate in theatre venues. Unless specified, drama/theatre education together will mean teaching and learning in both the official education structure and through the theatre. Separately, arts and culture refer to the professional arts sector whereas the formal system is defined as K-12. Art forms refer to drama, music and dance in the performing arts.

### **Cultural Policy: Current and Future**

The underlying conception of “culture” in this paper is confined to the arts<sup>3</sup>. In the discussion of policy matters in the arts in Hong Kong, it is important to recognise that while the Government, through the Home Affairs Bureau (HAB) as its policy formulation arm, believes it has a cultural policy, the arts and cultural sector refutes the existence of any such given that

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<sup>3</sup> Culture can also be defined as including intangible cultural heritage, the creative industries amongst others.

what exists is overly general without details, strategies, schedule, targets or priorities. The entire Government's cultural policy is extracted below from the HAB's website:

*The Government's cultural policy comprises the following major elements:*

- *respect freedom of creation and expression;*
- *provide opportunities for wider participation;*
- *encourage diversified and balanced development; and*
- *provide a supportive environment and conditions (venues, funding, education and administration).*

*This policy is in line with the core values of Hong Kong as a free, diversified and open society. As a facilitator, the Government is committed to upholding the freedom of cultural and artistic creation and expression, as well as providing an environment that supports the development of culture and the arts, both contemporary and traditional.*

*In the process of formulating and implementing the arts and cultural policy, the Home Affairs Bureau coordinates the work among relevant Bureaus and Departments, maintains close contact with arts groups, and listens to the opinions of various sectors.*

*The Government will continue to devote resources through a multi-pronged approach (i.e. arts programme development, manpower training, promotion of arts education, and audience building) to further strengthen our cultural software. Our cultural vision for Hong Kong, is to raise our cultural literacy and to develop Hong Kong into an international cultural metropolis. It is our wish to see Hong Kong evolve into a city where life is celebrated through cultural pursuit, where its people find enjoyment in the arts, are enlightened by different cultures and enriched by social diversity.*

Unlike Ozca (2000:2), policy here is not “contested terrain” which is “struggled over”. It is “delivered in tablets of stone”. It is value laden (Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard & Henry, 1997) and policy-making from a singular perspective. Dye's definition is suitably descriptive of this current policy: it is “whatever governments choose to, or not to do” (1992:2). At best, the paragraphs are statements of objectives— freedom of creation and expression, diversified, open, an international cultural metropolis -- that are always politically correct. No one would argue with them yet few would understand what this vision exactly is – what is cultural literacy and what constitutes a cultural metropolis – and the strategies to achieve the lofty goals. The “policy” describes, in Government speak, abstractions of arts and culture conveying the message to the public that the arts are ephemeral, if not altogether vague.

The issue is that the Government views policy as an end product which, when produced, ceases to evolve and is simply to be followed. Its approach to policy is one of technical rationality exclusively along a chronological path:

*These include: problem definition; clarification of values, goals and objectives; identification of options to achieve goals; cost/benefit analysis of options; selection of a course of action; evaluation of a course of action; and modification to the programme (ibid., p. 25)*

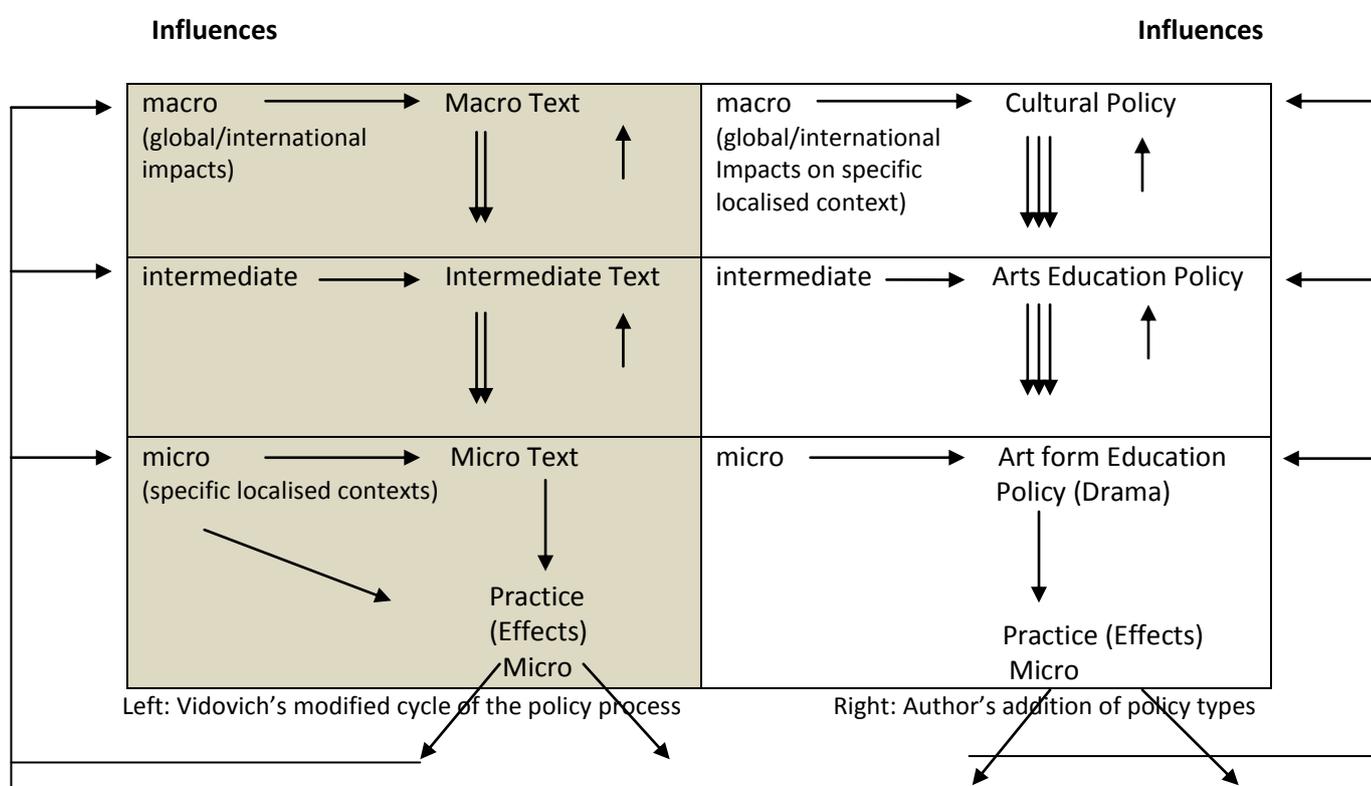
While these steps are indeed part of the process of policy formulation, the road is seldom straightforward unless it is Government controlled with little input from the arts sector. The functionalist approach, though tempting for administrative convenience, is evocative of Hong Kong's economic success mindset that is linear and fast and top-down. It also belies a gap between the labyrinthine realities of modernist bureaucracy and contemporary governance. Although Taylor *et al* (1997) comment on education policy, their views are applicable to cultural policy. They view policy as both process and product; it is the production of "the text, the text itself, ongoing modifications to the text and processes of implementation into practice" (*ibid.*,25). As a reflection of the complexities of 21<sup>st</sup> century global existence shaped by Appardurai's scapes, I argue that policy should no longer be prescriptive and has to seriously consider pluralism, a multi-pronged approach and, in social science qualitative parlance, the need for thick description.

Ball, from his tomes of publication on education policy, would view the current Hong Kong cultural policy as being devoid of process. He views policy formulation as a conglomeration of "micro-political processes and agency of individual practitioners" (1994:14) that constructs policy at local level. Ball has removed policy formulation from its pedestal (Ozga, 2000). Power is decentralised from Government to the community and in polylogues, tensions in policy-making are highly evident. Hong Kong's current cultural

statements are monologues lacking in the multi-layering and recurring movement that Bowe, Ball and Hold (1992) conceived of as a policy cycle of three main policy contexts:

- Context of influence: struggles over policy discourses among stakeholders
- Context of text production: drafting of policy texts
- Context of practice: policy interpretation and re-creation (1992, p. 6)

In Vidovich's modification (2001) of Ball's process cycle, he undertook three changes: the state as focus is expanded to the global context; the state is constrained through policy as being state-centred rather than state-controlled; and thirdly, the inter-linkages and influence of the three contexts are emphasised. The tripartite policy cycle becomes a process in a continuum.



**Figure 1. Vidovich's Modified Framework and Author's Addition**

The left segment of Figure 1 shows Vidovich's (2001) amendments. The policy process is affected by influences (shaded grey) from global and international impact. Vidovich explains the interconnections between policy levels through arrows of different intensities as the relative strength of top-down and bottom up processes. Double arrows are stronger than single ones, signifying where the controlling power is in the construction and interpretation of the process. At the micro policy practice level which is the local context, effects felt are discharged out and washes back to upper levels in a continuous cycle.

The right section of Figure 1 is my addition to reflect Vidovich's adjustments from the tripartite inter-connections for *one* policy process to the inter-relationship of policy *types* in policy-making similarly on three levels. In other words, cultural policy at the macro level impacts on arts education policy at the intermediary level that, in context, affects policy at the art form level which in this discussion relates to drama education policy. Olssen, Codd & O'Neill view contextualisation as "transformative discourse that can have real social effects in response to contemporary crises of survival and sustainability" (2004:3), two terms that Hope (2004) discusses later as the make-or-break pillar of art policy. The arrows demonstrate estimated strength of controlling power.

It is important to bear in mind that each and every policy type illustrated on the right side of Figure 1 undergoes the same Vidovichian policy process as on the left side. The resulting complexities in policy formulation across both sections become all the more layered and mutually influential. Any adjustment in one policy type at any level will affect the dual tripartite relationships holistically.

Taking Vidovich's lead (2001) in posing questions to investigate a particular policy process, I have chosen the most pertinent questions from his list for Hong Kong's macro

cultural policy both for probing the process as well as the policy *per se*. Those with quotationmarks are direct quotes. The questions are in no particular order of priority.

*Macro Context of Influence: What struggles are occurring to influence cultural policy?*

1. What is the impact of global and international influences?
2. “What are the prevailing ideological, economic and political conditions?”
3. Who is in control and what are their interests? Who are other possible contributors?
4. “Over what time period did the context of influence evolve before the policy was constructed?”
5. Is the policy bound by modernist/colonial or post-modernist/post-colonial mindsets?
6. To what extent is the policy a transfer from existing Western models and how far is it applicable to Hong Kong as an Asian city if that is the preferred context?
7. What is a healthy cultural city?

*Intermediate Context of Policy Text Production: What struggles are occurring in the production of the cultural policy text?*

1. “What processes are used to construct the policy text and why?”
2. Whose interests are served? Who is the audience<sup>4</sup>?
3. “Which values are reflected in the policy?”
4. “How accessible or understandable is the policy text to the audience?”
5. “Is there a specific mechanism to evaluate the policy?”

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<sup>4</sup> Audience is taken as the public and not a theatre audience.

6. How important is research? What purpose does research serve? Are research findings published and balanced?
7. Are diverse voices heard and incorporated?
8. To what extent is consultation not lip service?
9. Will there be stages in drafting in which the arts community is to be given voice?

*Micro Context of Practice/Effects: What struggles are occurring over cultural policy practices/effects?*

1. How implementable is the policy and how is evaluation to be achieved?
2. “Are practitioners at the local level empowered by the policy?”
3. “How open is the policy to interpretation by practitioners?”
4. “Are there winners and losers?”
5. Is there a mechanism for dialogue with the arts sector post-policy implementation?
6. Is the policy bureau engaged with the arts sector and in what ways?
7. Is policy bureau helpful and supportive?
8. Is there a risk averse or unadventurous mindset to the policy?
9. Is there a tendency to implement only what is most popular?
10. Are there experts in the field within the bureau and of what proportion?
11. How much real inter-bureau collaboration is there to ensure the policy is inter-connective? How effective is it?

The replies to the questions will impact on the intermediate and micro levels of policy-making.

### **Drama Education Policy: Current and Future**

With the very broad and loose nature of the current cultural policy, it is not difficult to imagine that the arts education policy is of a similar ilk. In actuality, there is none.

Nonetheless, there is an Arts Education Key Learning Area (KLA) Curriculum Guide from the former Education Department for local primary and secondary schools<sup>5</sup> which offers a glimpse of the present state of arts learning. In Hong Kong, the Government's education reform initiatives in the late 1990s brought about the ground-breaking key learning area in 2002 in which curricula was developed for key stages 1-3 in primary and secondary schools. Both music and visual arts curriculum guides have separate and detailed documents. The KLA guide mentions drama but in no way offers a separate curriculum. In all the years, drama has never been a subject although it has been gaining ground in recent years as a pedagogical approach.

No drama education policy exists. The Arts Education section of the current Education Bureau (EBD), in response to my email enquiry in February this year on drama education policy provided a long list of achievements in support of drama education for projects in school, drama competitions and from different funding sources. The reply follows with, “. . . schools can adopt appropriate modes and strategies to implement drama according to their vision and mission, needs, as well as circumstances, and drama is widely used as a tool to facilitate learning and teaching in various subjects” (Tai, 2012). At a long stretch, this can be regarded as an *ipso facto* policy, one in which the extrinsic values of drama override the intrinsic and where schools are left to their own devices<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> This paper does not cover non-local and international schools as they are on a different system.

<sup>6</sup> Teachers are given some hours of on the job training which, for drama, is inadequate.

The major challenge is piecemeal development. In the sense that the city was one of the first in Asia<sup>7</sup> to develop a KLA in arts education, Hong Kong has not maximised its head-start due to a lack of policy amongst other prerequisites. There is clearly no correlation between the macro cultural policy and intermediate levels of arts education policy formulation. Linkage is vital for continuity and sustainable growth. The absence of inter-connective policies renders Government investment in the arts productive only to the extent of initial access and hence, non-optimal as a result of non-sustainability. This phenomenon is indicative of the absence of comprehensive planning. Another pertinent reason is a poverty of deeper understanding and prolonged thinking on arts education beyond the entry-point. Inadequate expertise within Government is likewise a crucial corollary.

Fragmented arts education in the city also revolves round the long-standing appropriation of the term by the education system. Only until recently, arts education is connoted as the sole domain of teaching and learning in the formal system only. Yet schools are not the only channel for drama education. Arts organisations, and for our intent and purpose, theatre companies<sup>8</sup>, are part of the educative equation. In the conventional learning system, schools are under the aegis of the EDB. Until the Culture Bureau officially exists (if it does), arts and culture will have been managed by the HAB, the policy formulation arm<sup>9</sup>. The two apparently divergent sectors have lived out their routines quite separately in Hong Kong until the last decade when initial forays began in earnest because of the 2000 education reforms and the appearance of the WKCD.

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<sup>7</sup> The South Korean Government has since caught up and surged ahead when in 2005 it established the Korea Arts and Culture Education Services with a very detailed publication on arts education all round for schools and the community.

<sup>8</sup> The earliest practitioners of drama education in Hong Kong are Chung Ying Theatre Company that began in 1979 (circa) with Ming Ri Institute of Education (a puppet theatre company) and Zuni Icosahedron in the 1980s and others following suit.

<sup>9</sup> See Notes.

Consequently, arts organisations have been slow to react to the needs of education and arts education just as schooling, never much ventured beyond arts education as curriculum subjects. Schools feel that the arts are periphery while arts groups believe audience building is purely just that.

Understandably, the main goal of theatre companies lies in artistic programming and productions. Education as a philosophy is seldom articulated and education policy remains to be configured in almost all such organisations. Generally, arts organisations associate educative intent as audience building to increase box office revenue as part of the economic need to survive. Audience building is much more a marketing concern whereby theatre groups send out outreach teams to reach new audiences with a demonstration of the art form. If learning occurs, it is an accidental by-product rather than planned practice. An education philosophy or unit, on the other hand, encompasses the educational intent to work with the art form from a learning angle.

The awareness in drama/theatre companies that it is in their long-term interest to focus on education is needed for two reasons: nurturing a committed and new audience is exigent upon knowledge and understanding of the art form through both intellectual and emotional engagement. The learning public is wider than the school system. Secondly, it is a responsibility of these companies to raise the qualitative demand bar from the public so that higher standards are revisited upon the companies themselves, thereby elevating standards in the arts, all round. The public is the learner as are school students. This consciousness is comparatively weak, again for two reasons: education is disarticulated whenever there are insufficient resources, causing interrupted audience growth and secondly, arts educators who are able to straddle both the formal drama education system and theatre have limited training and are of highly uneven quality and have differing agendas.

In the 21st century, learners are ubiquitous, particularly in the light of life-long learning. Both the student in drama and a member of the audience are learners in the widest sense of the word. Both encapsulate the human dimension of what eventually constitutes a city. This human capacity, as opposed to the sole focus of utilitarian economic progress, needs to be reflected in policy formulation. Ozga asserts that “policy is to be found everywhere in education, and not just at the level of central government . . . because it contributes to a democratic project in education, which in turn contributes to democracy as the creation of an informed, active citizenry . . .” (2000:2).

In Hong Kong, an arts education policy is non-existent and whatever can be deduced from the arts education curriculum guide is dissociated from Hong Kong’s cultural policy, one which acknowledges education yet in no way elaborates on it. In an integral tripartite policy cycle, the philosophy of a cultural policy should be embedded in the arts education policy as it, in turn, appears as the framework in art form and drama education policies. In the Vidovichian order of things, influences at macro level affects policy text formation at the intermediary stage just as policy practices and contentions following on re-inform the macro and intermediate (2001). A drama education policy in the continuum of response and adjustment is at the frontline of comprehensive implementation. Its effects in the overall policy cycle cannot be undermined.

Drama education policy cannot be disarticulated from cultural policy if the latter is to function well. Engaging drama (and arts) educators in policy making is vital given the inherent ability of that community to accommodate and create in an age of new global possibilities. As Neelands attests, “Drama, of course, by itself does nothing. It is only what teachers do with drama that makes the difference” (in O’Connor, 2010:133). Drama educators are meso-level actors, “agents with recontextualising functions” (Jephcote & Davies, 2004:550). Clearly there is complexity in meso-level actors. Jephcote & Davies see

their greatest strength and weaknesses at this level as they are practising interpreters of policy with a plurality of agendas and motives. The situation, however, is complicated because they cannot be removed since they mediate between policy and practice. If the drama educators are the lynchpins of policy practice, then indubitably, their mindset, content and pedagogy form the basis of meaningful delivery.

In Hong Kong, drama education in schools taught by drama/theatre companies is market-oriented in the main. By that, I refer to the production of content and alignment of teaching to the curriculum, in the main, for extrinsic objectives of learning in subjects other than drama. Drama/theatre is a tool. Often, at a theatre experience, schools are given the basics and the ingredients for success are fun and energy. This formula is erroneously believed to make theatre attractive; it is likewise a strategy to grow audiences. This may reflect Hong Kong's habit of instant gratification which could be part of its historical DNA to achieve quickly and move on at the expense of sustainability and at better depth. As an examiner for the Hong Kong Arts Development Council, I have witnessed first-hand experiences of such theatre education that plays for laughs in order to cultivate the notion that drama is fun. It is small wonder why a comment from the McMaster Review undertaken for the United Kingdom is applicable here:

*. . . too many organisations, particularly from the performing arts, have been content to supply audiences with a superficial experience that provides an immediate satisfaction but no lasting impact (2008, p. 18).*

This is great disservice done by any theatre group in the name of drama/theatre education. In its haste to achieve and confirm positive feedback, the essence of drama and theatre is devalued. In his discussion of visual art education policy in a world of cross purposes, Hope comments on contemporary youth culture in the USA. How far are these observations applicable to Hong Kong?

*A youth culture that sends the current messages – everything must be fun; everything must be sensational; everything must be simple; everything must be new; everything must change constantly; everything must be fast; everything must be easy; everything is essentially about ‘me’, what’s ‘cool’ is what adults don’t like – is not supportive of serious education in any discipline . . . (2004, pp. 103-104)*

Such an approach to delivering arts education to learners is unsettling and disconcerting: it patronises learners’ aptitude for deeper learning; it sends a misinformed message to the audience that this kind of drama/theatre presented is the yardstick on which all other drama (and other art forms) is to be measured; it reverberates and washes back into the planning in education institutions that the nature of future training for drama educators is towards lightweight pedagogy; and finally, nothing very much is learned. Abbs questioning of contemporary education begs to be repeated here, “What for? What ultimately for?” (2003:30)

While consumerism in globalised economies penultimately takes responsibility, Governments should take the ultimate blame for not fully understanding the nature of arts learning and for ascribing cursory drama/theatre education as teaching and learning already achieved and well done when the theatre venue or school programme is fully subscribed. Harvie (2009) reminds us that observations of the changing representations of a city in drama over time give an understanding of the city itself. What is Hong Kong in drama and the arts a decade later?

As the free market economy expands in the world, even in theatre the “conservative and homogenizing” (*ibid.*, 34) globalising effect is felt. A clear example is in the global mega musical economy where every bit of the show is franchised, from the music to sets, stars, and merchandising. McTheatre, coined from the sameness of McDonald’s worldwide, has its pros and cons. The standards to be expected from McDonald’s worldwide ensure consistency yet ironically it is this very standardisation that severely undermines originality and creativity

(Rebellato,2009). The same McTheatre phenomenon can happen both in theatre venues and in the classroom through the photocopied similarity of drama education.

In Hong Kong, this impact is evident with theatre organisations and drama education groups producing musicals as a trend, not to the grand global scale, but in form, content and occasional star power. The homogenising effect is already evident locally although diversity is said to be the theme in public funding of programmes. We need to caution against “diversity with similarities” as this can cause a misrepresentation – that drama/theatre equals musicals, that only musicals succeed in what Harvie terms the “neutralizing cultural effect” (*ibid.*, p. 35) when a city’s cultural identity dispels its own for others: “The competition championed by capitalism’s supporters produces not choice but merely a sense of choice in a market that may indeed be swollen, but with uniformity” (*ibid.*, p. 42).

Any cultural policy to be created for Hong Kong should include “diversity” only after careful contemplation of its underlying definition, implications and strategic planning timetable. Otherwise, diversity can be regarded as anything goes and what is able to attract the largest numbers.

In Hong Kong where efficiency is highly valued because it reaps increasing economic benefits, speed counts. Photocopying and making adjustments to the copy appear to be efficient. If education, in and through the theatre and drama in the classroom, is about nurturing human beings, then McTheatre can only be dehumanising.

Any cultural, arts education and drama education policy would do well to avoid commodification. Publicly funded arts organisations are constantly reminded by Government that they exist because of the taxpayer’s dollar and as a result, money needs to be expended wisely. The Government itself may wish to be mindful that the same dollar also needs to be more appropriately invested in longer-term arts portfolios that harvests sustained results than in hedge funds meted out for a quick return. Speed can maim, if not kill. I fear commodified

learning in drama will, in the end, return to plague this city for its lack of distinctiveness, character and identity. The cultural vision for Hong Kong as stipulated in the present cultural policy is “to raise our cultural literacy and to develop Hong Kong into an international cultural metropolis”. It would be in the interest of Hong Kong for the incoming Culture Bureau to properly and clearly define this. Otherwise, Hong Kong may end up looking very much like yet another globalised city, culturally.

Would it be policy making as “activism” taking any purpose and disconnecting it from reality? Would perspectives be narrowed so that everything is “evaluated and projected on the basis of what happens with respect a single issue”? (Hope, 2004:95). Such activism has "no interest in what has been learned before; no willingness to consider, understand, or support the interlocking elements of a larger system; no patience; no sense of humor; and a highly selective acceptance of the facts (*ibid.*). Or would it be policy making that is meaningful and wisdom seeking, that:

- tells known truth as comprehensively a possible as it tells the truth of what is unknown
- can identify and illuminate conflicting agendas and which
- can help avoid long-term losses at the cost of short-term gains? (*ibid.*, p. 96).

In view of globalised existence, and for drama education policy formulation to engender a healthy -- and not just a survival-based -- environment and ecology, the following questions are put forward along Vidovich’s (2001) tripartite contexts. The questions foreground macro drama education policy influences, intermediate policy text production and micro policy practice level focusing on drama practitioners’ praxis are all designed to link to the other policy levels in the continuum. The queries below are localised to Hong Kong and are initial

suggestions. Those in quotations are from Vidovich (2001). The questions are not in any order of priority.

*Macro Context of Influence : What struggles will occur to influence drama/theatre education policy?*

1. How does this policy relate to the arts education and cultural policies?
2. What are the current strengths and gaps in drama education? How will they influence policy-making?
3. Given the strong underpinnings of the global economic rationale, to what extent is the policy approving teaching solely to the market?
4. To what extent is McTheatre being practised in schools and in the community?
5. To what extent will there be sustainable and impactful collaboration between the Education Bureau and the possible Culture Bureau?
6. In terms of public funding, how is the frequent cry of “better than nothing” detrimental to the health of the sector? What can be done?
7. To what extent is teaching drama in school intrinsic or extrinsically based for other subjects?
8. Is there a healthy balance in accessibility and depth?

*Intermediate Context of Policy Text Production: What struggles will occur in the production of the drama/theatre education policy text?*

1. Is it a top-down, bottom-up or collaborative policy? Is there a phased-in approach?

2. What indicators are required to evaluate quality? On which rung in the ladder of quality is current practice for drama educators? How is evaluation undertaken both quantitatively and qualitatively?
3. How does the policy encourage the teaching of drama as fun yet is impactful?
4. How much of the policy encourages skills-based and intellectual teaching and learning?
5. What kinds of values are represented and whose?
6. Who is the policy drafter and to what extent is he knowledgeable?
7. How accessible is the policy to education and cultural practitioners?

*Micro Context of Practice/Effects: “What struggles will occur over drama education policy practices/effects vis-à-vis drama/theatre educators?”*

1. “What processes are used to put the policy into practice and why?”
2. Is the policy accepted at practitioners’ level and what can be done if not?
3. How does the policy ascertain the quality of drama educators? How does that reflect on their training?
4. To what extent does the policy enable drama educators to contribute to the drama field beyond school needs for wider cultural ecological good?
5. How does policy support drama/theatre educators in audience building that covers breadth and depth?
6. How does the policy deal with breadth and depth of educators?
7. How can the policy enable school teachers to understand the value of intrinsic drama education beyond the curriculum?

## **Our Future**

I would like to conclude with two thoughts. Greig's "rough" theatre calls for learners, the audience and theatre professionals "to empathise and reflect, to question and unfix packaged, second-hand and commodified images of the world" (in Nicholson, 2009:49). His concept speaks for itself. Greene, whose quote opened this paper -- "The point is that simply being in the presence of art forms is not sufficient to occasion aesthetic experience or to change a life"(2000:125) – intimates that transformations in and through the arts are derived not from mere exposure to the arts. There has to be movement beyond this first step. The tripartite cultural, arts education and drama education policies all work beyond the initial step. The question is how?

McGuigan (2004) in re-articulating cultural critic Raymond Williams'(1984) *State of Culture and Beyond*, speaks forcibly of a cultural policy for display as opposed to a proper cultural policy. While the latter is now superseded by development in the arts, the former still serves as a timely reminder for any Government undertaking policy formulation. A policy for display is, first and foremost, national aggrandisement for pomp and circumstance.

McGuigan cites Euro Disney and London's Millennium Dome as examples. Following on, it is a practice of economic reductionism that rationalises public cultural investment, including leverage for economic growth and promoting the interest of corporations (*ibid.*). Without going into further details, it is poignant to reflect on Hong Kong and its future in all policies associated with the arts at every level. As a leading economic powerhouse, do we not already have solid grounding to move beyond the fast, the immediate and world records for improved profundity? After all, the city has shed its refugee survival mentality decades ago and perhaps it is time now to heed the beckoning of a proper and healthy cultural future.

Note:

1. The Home Affairs Bureau's other arts portfolios includes maintaining the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, a higher education institution for skills-based performing arts; administering and funding nine major groups and matches funds for small/medium ones through its Advisory Committee on Arts

Development; supervising the Leisure & Cultural Services Department (LCSD) that controls the majority of venues in the territory as it acts as an impresario for local and overseas programmes. The LCSD also provides arts education programming through funding arts groups in diverse art forms to perform and visit schools and district communities; and financing the Hong Kong Arts Development Council, a grantor to a multitude of small/medium arts organisations across diverse art forms. The Drama Subcommittee metes out funds to its multifarious theatre companies and with schools.

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