

## **Appropriating Drama Pedagogy:**

### **Learning from the Local Practices in Hong Kong**

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#### ***Abstract***

*This paper aims at describing and explaining how drama pedagogy is appropriated in Chinese language classrooms in Hong Kong. Drawing on the theories of dialogue and appropriation of Mikhail Bakhtin, the research shows that the dialogicality of drama in Hong Kong's classrooms are conditional, and therefore deviant from the conventional as conceptualised and described in the major literature. A spectrum of the appropriation of drama pedagogy in language classrooms in Hong Kong is developed and discussed. At one end of the spectrum, there is still domination of the teacher's monologic input of official knowledge and skills; at the other end, destabilisation of the centrality of the text and the authoritarian role of the teacher is identified suggesting alteration in the classroom communication routine, and even the opening of the drama world. This spectrum illustrates how the teachers waver between persisting monologue and embracing dialogue, the result of which is the development of a hybrid approach to appropriate drama pedagogy.*

## **1. The drama pedagogy in Hong Kong**

Drama-in-Education (DiE) was imported from the West to Hong Kong as part of the educational reforms taking place in the late nineties. This was seen as an innovative and transformative pedagogy for resolving some of the perpetual problems of the local education system. Since then, various teacher training programmes, funding projects, as well as arts partnerships between schools and drama artists have been launched for promoting its application. Following all these promotion activities, local researchers generally focus on the effectiveness of DiE in teacher development or curriculum change (Art Development Council, 2005; Curriculum Development Institute, 2005). However, there is a lack of concern about the actual practice of DiE in the classroom. As Neelands (2004) warns, to naturalise the Western drama and theatre practice, or mystify its power of transformation would simplify the application of drama in different social and cultural contexts, and mitigate the experiences of transformation generated from the local drama practice. From the socio-cultural perspective of teacher's education, the learning of a new pedagogy, whether it is derived from one's indigenous culture or borrowed from a foreign one, is a complex, dynamic and developmental process. The study reveals that the gap between the orthodox DiE and local practices is apparent. Hong Kong school teachers and drama educators tend to employ a hybrid approach to integrate various drama/theatre education models, conventions and elements into their classrooms, meanwhile combining them with the traditional pedagogy which they are familiar with. They broadly refer to this hybrid approach as 'drama pedagogy'. To account for the emergence of this kind of drama pedagogy, the tensions between the conflicting priorities, goals and practices of Chinese language classrooms and DiE are a major consideration in this study.

## **2. Theoretical underpinnings**

Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) concepts of 'appropriation' and 'dialogue' are applied as the theoretical underpinnings of this study. 'Appropriation' focuses on the extent to which the teachers adopt a new and alien pedagogical tool to transform their daily teaching; whereas 'dialogue' provides us with a framework for interpreting the dialogicality of DiE by looking at how the pupils participate in the classrooms which have integrated drama pedagogy. It is assumed that there is a causal relationship between the approach chosen for appropriating

drama pedagogy and the dialogicality of the teaching and learning it generates.

## **2.1. Appropriation**

The concept of 'appropriation' originates from Bakhtin's language theory. According to Bakhtin (1981), every word is half someone else's. '*It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent...*' (p.293). Appropriation therefore refers to the speaker's active and evaluative response to other people's words, texts or discourses. In the view of the Bakhtinians, appropriation involves decisions, of resistance, absorption, disposal, modification, reconstruction and re-conceptualisation. It is a process that gives rise to creative understanding and transformation (Morson & Emerson, 1990; Holquist, 1990). Recently, socio-cultural psychologists have 'appropriated' the notion of appropriation for understanding the process of how a teacher learns a new pedagogical tool and applies it for certain purposes and in certain contexts. They find that the process of appropriation is hardly without conflict and resistance. In order to examine the realisation of appropriation, the relations between the appropriator, pedagogy and the settings to which it applies have to be taken into consideration (Wertsch, 1998; Herrenkohl & Wertsch, 1999; Grossman, Smagorinsky & Valencia, 1999). Furthermore, Wertsch (1998; Herrenkohl & Wertsch, 1999) differentiates mastery from appropriation by which he argues that appropriation goes beyond a technical and functional level of mastering a tool or a strategy. It involves commitment to understanding its conceptual underpinnings and also modifying it for cultural development. Wertsch's conceptualization of appropriation suggests that teachers' integration of drama pedagogy covers both the strategic and the conceptual plane.

## **2.2. The dialogicality of drama pedagogy**

Bakhtin makes a distinction between monologic discourse and dialogic discourse which is widely applied as a tool to analyse the communication between teachers and students. Based on the notion of dialogic discourse, scholars advocate for the transformation of classroom interaction with a new epistemology (Alexander, 2004; Ward, 1994; Sidorkin, 1999). Drama pedagogy provides the necessary conditions for meeting this goal.

According to Bahktin (1981), monologic discourse is synonymous with 'authoritarian discourse' (p.342). As its name suggests, monologic discourse demands the pupils' affirmation, allegiance and reproduction. The theoretical underpinning of monologic discourse lies in the teacher's belief in a single, universal and ready-made truth, as well as a language that eliminates rather than embraces diversity and possibility. In contrast, dialogical discourse celebrates differences which then enable the teacher to be aware of, respond to and work with the knowledge and languages of the pupils. It in turn gives rise to the pupils' active participation by which they are able to retell the given meaning in their own words, and co-create the classroom discourse. The underpinning of DiE is an emancipation of knowledge and language that are constructed and delivered from a single viewpoint. When it is applied to the classroom, fluid, dynamic and intricate communications that involve multiple perspectives, polysemy and heteroglossia can be identified. By analysing the structure of the classroom and the implementation of drama activities, it is clearly shown that classrooms with drama pedagogy, especially those using DiE, are inherently dialogic.

The structure and operation of traditional classrooms are almost always precisely, rationally and rigidly prescribed by the teacher, whereas those in lessons using DiE set out to be explorative, variable and open-ended. First of all, lessons using DiE are basically composed of a series of drama conventions. The convention itself is a kind of dramatic activity, a form that serves to engage the pupils in exploring a text, a theme, an issue, an event or a character. It is geared towards supporting the students' expression, creation and meaning making (Neelands, 1995). The arrangement of drama conventions is plastic, flexible, and even 'ill-structured'. Indeed many drama scholars point out that teachers cannot fix in advance what the students are supposed to learn (Fleming, 2001; O'Neill & Lambert, 1982) but rather select and arrange activities in accordance to their responses (Neelands, 1995). O'Neill and Lambert (1982) elaborate the students' participation in drama conventions. They describe that '*a large proportion of the content of the lesson will be contributed by the pupils, it will be unpredictable*' (p.20). This suggests that the students will take an active position in producing knowledge with their own words based on what is suggested by the teacher.

In addition to this, what makes drama pedagogy distinctive from other kinds of pedagogies is the former's claim to be innovative, progressive and

dialogic as it demands the students to engage in an 'as-if' situation through acting. Once the students act, they transcend themselves and then dwell in other people's lives, through which they transform their limited frame of seeing, thinking, feeling and behaving (Neelands, 2001; Winston, 2000). In view of this, acting brings about dialogue between the roles and the actors (students). On the one hand, the actors have to actively respond to the roles as well as the script with their own understanding; on the other hand, the roles work as 'otherness' to confront the actors (students), arouse their consciousness, thus helping them to expand, enrich and transform themselves (Tam, 2008). Therefore, even though a script is given or a role is assigned to the students, they function only as a pre-text (Neill, 1995), a stimulus, an initial frame, or a prompt for opening up the space of activated dialogue within the classroom. Nevertheless, it is noted that the dialogic culture and epistemic quality of DiE varies from place to place, and there is no universal prescription or formula for its appropriation. For this reason, in order to understand how DiE is appropriated by the teachers, perhaps one should firstly examine the micro dynamics of the external conditions, the social and cultural factors, as well as their significance in the local context where the teachers are situated (Wertsch, 1998). As suggested by previous research, the characteristics of the educational context as well as the specifics of the Chinese language classroom in Hong Kong's schools may work as latent constraints to drama pedagogy.

Chinese language classrooms at all school levels in Hong Kong are widely described as an authoritarian space. With barely an exception, the various aspects of teaching and learning including teacher, pupil, activity, task, teaching materials and classroom communication, are teacher-centred, examination-oriented and text-based (Tse et al., 1995; Lee, 1996). Hu (2002) sums up these local characteristics as 'Four R's and Four M's', namely '*reception, repetition, review, reproduction*' and '*meticulousness, memorisation, mental activeness and mastery*'. For that reason, Chinese language classrooms are usually serious, structured and studious, are inundated with teacher monologue, individual seat work and unilateral communication, and suggest a behaviorist practice of reproducing teachers' preferred language and literacy. It seems that there are a lot of incongruities between normalised Chinese language classrooms and drama pedagogy. Teachers' resistance against change in whatever aspect or manner may arise. For this reason, this paper aims at investigating how drama pedagogy is appropriated in Hong

Kong Chinese language classrooms. Issues such as what are the elements kept or forsaken in the application, to what extent does the dialogic transformation take place correspondingly, and how does appropriation work as a countermovement to normalised Chinese language classrooms.

### **3. Methodology**

The study is based on qualitative research using an ethnographic approach in a naturalistic setting. The fieldwork lasted for one year in two urban primary schools involving 13 teachers and drama artists. Finally, 23 classrooms were selected for study. Each visit lasted from one to one and a half hours. In the field, I positioned myself as a participant observer (Merriam, 1998). I took field notes, collected pupils' work, conducted interviews and video-taped the lessons to capture and describe the themes, content, process, organisation, people and activities. The preliminary conclusion deduced from the data collected draws attention to the teachers' adopting a hybrid approach and applying drama in a piecemeal way to the classrooms. Conflicts are noted when this Western pedagogy encounters the study classrooms. A methodology has to be developed to capture the full picture of their practices without losing the subtle dynamics. The videotapes were transcribed for textual analyses. This is counterpoised with analysing the choice and organisation of all kinds of tasks and activities that took place in the classroom as a unit of analysis. This paper is an extract of the original research which focuses specifically on the patterns of the selection and arrangement of tasks and activities in classroom drama application. The critical aspects that emerge from the observed patterns are identified and discussed as follows.

#### **3.1. The unit of analysis: task and activity**

Alexander (2000) argues that task and activity capture the conceptual and the practical aspects of classroom teaching and learning respectively. The former refers to a planned approach to teaching by which the teachers advance the pupils' understanding; whereas the latter is the process and way of operating this plan. The application of Alexander's definition assists one in deciphering the structure of a lesson that is prearranged by the teacher. For example, dramatising a story is a task. To accomplish it, the teacher would develop a repertoire of activities including direction instruction, group discussion and rehearsal. Based on this understanding, the classrooms in this study were

classified into four categories according to the task assigned (Table One).

*[Insert]* Diagram One: The numbers of various kinds of activity

### **3.2. The categorization of activity**

Treating activities as a unit of analysis provides a frame to capture the critical features shared by drama and non-drama activity. With reference to the Bakhtinian and Vygotskian perspective on activity, action, deed and event, I view activities as contextual, purposeful, holistic, dynamic and productive (Bakhtin, 1993; Ashton, 1996). Activities entail the students' participation in the given tasks in a particular place, time and way, the result of which provokes responses thereby realizing teaching and learning as well as progress. In view of this, I therefore decompose all the lessons into 169 activities to examine the goals of the classes, the involved practitioners, the results generated, and lastly the representation mode involved. Finally, a repertoire of activities was generated. Statistical analysis that mainly grounded in the sorting and the regularity of activity was conducted (Diagram One and Two).

*[Insert]* Diagram Two: The percentage of various kinds of activity

## **4. Results**

### **4.1. The aim and function of activity**

As shown in Table One, most of the lessons treated drama pedagogy as a new means to fulfill the old demands of the current teaching and the curriculum. Amongst the 23 tasks, 87 % (Category C, Category A and B) of them were targeted at teaching vocabulary, linguistic knowledge and literacy skills. One-fifth of them (Category A and B) involved memorization of the text. Driven by these teaching objectives, several features are found in all the lessons.

*[Insert]* Table One: The distribution of task categories

The first issue is the critical features of the hybrid approach. All the tasks of the study lessons put great emphasis on the acquisition of linguistic and literacy skills in a 'bottom-up' model. It means that the teaching and learning of the

decoding skills was considered as basic and prerequisite and hence prearranged prior to the drama application. As a result, 23 lessons were delivered in a rigid, established pattern following what I call the 'teacher inputs → pupil outputs' formula. In the input phase we find direct instruction for the whole class which was coupled with teacher-led talk. Drama activity was always introduced in the 'output' phase. This reveals that drama activity always worked with non-drama, transmissive and conventional teaching methods reducing the use of drama to an auxiliary tool for practicing, demonstrating, consolidating or assessing the pupils' learning. The textbooks as well as the teachers' language were still used as an authoritarian discourse which directly governed the choice of task and the sequence of lesson structure.

Secondly, because of the integration of drama activity, in the 'output' phase the teachers' extensive and evident control were either fading out or temporarily suspended. For example, in the lessons of dramatization (Category A and B) the pupils were given greater learning autonomy. These lessons were composed of sub-sessions namely '*group work (discussion/writing) → rehearsal → performance*'. Collaboration and participation were noted amongst the pupils when they were taking up various positions and roles in and out of the drama. Nevertheless, such kinds of transformation were still under constraint. For one thing, the 'what' to perform was specified in accordance with the text and the criteria imposed by the teachers. In some of the lessons the recitation of the text was even practiced at the expense of the pupils' exploring and experiencing the drama world. In Category C drama activities devoted to acting out a certain number of vocabularies or a particular part of the text were prevailing. It suggests that the structure of the text greatly determined the lesson organisation. Drama activity was peripheral and fragmented as it was solely introduced as an insertion into the lesson. By this means, lessons of Category A, B and C were relatively teacher-directed, text-centred and performance-based. Notwithstanding all these limitations, the integration of drama activity at least changed the norms of communication in the classroom. The all-or-nothing stance towards dialogicality and hence the transformative agency of drama pedagogy was re-considered. This point will be elaborated in consideration of the teachers' perspective later in this article.

#### **4.2. Regularity of activity**

#### **4.2.1. Continuation of regular activity**

As confirmed by the participating teachers, giving direct instruction and teacher-led talk is the norm in the daily classroom. In this study, these two regular activities were practiced without default. They were arranged at the beginning of all the lessons as 'teacher inputs', suggesting a strong domination of the bottom up model. Differences were only found in terms of the number and the length of the input.

*[Insert]* Table Two: The numbers of regular activities

Direct instructions that were given included explanation, analysis and demonstration of vocabulary, linguistic and literacy skills, as well as the subject knowledge related to the theme of the text. Learning about these matters was supposed to prepare the pupils for the activities in the later stage of the lesson. For example, before asking the pupils to act out certain roles in a text, the teacher would provide them with concrete and detailed guidelines. The teachers saw it vital to firstly secure the delivery of the language skills that were demanded by the curriculum. When it comes to the teacher-led talk, the routine mode of interaction between the teacher and the pupils again predominated the scene. The teacher's will was exercised in a number of exemplified ways by nominating pupils to take part in planned actions; checking out the pupils' understanding and memorization of key points from time to time; and holding off answers until the pupils gave the 'correct' ones deemed by the teacher. This continuation of the regular activities further supports the proposition that the adoption of the already firmly established lesson pattern and language teaching goal impinges on the appropriation of drama pedagogy in the local classroom.

#### **4.2.2. Acculturation to occasional activity**

In order to change the academic-oriented and teacher-centred teaching and learning in local schools, constructivist pedagogies by means of discussion and different types of group work have been initiated since the late nineties. Despite that, genuine pupil-centred pedagogy that gives sanction to pupils' knowledge, language and literacy through participation is applied only occasionally in reality (Mok & Ko, 2000). Interestingly, the frequency and variety of using collaborative activities found in this study is higher in

comparison with that of drama convention. This discrepancy indicates that the teachers were more open to a constructive classroom rather than a dramatic space.

*[Insert]* Table Three: The numbers of occasional activities

When the teachers compared these ‘drama classrooms’ with the regular ones, they said they deliberately spoke less and incorporated more collaborative activities into the lesson. Their support to pupil collaboration and participation was evident in the performance activity. In fact, even though the script was given to the pupils for recitation in Category A task (Table One), a dynamic process of making, performing and responding could be observed in this phase. An extract taken from the pupils’ rehearsal in Lesson 17 gives further evidence to the pupil engagement in preparing their performance.

Extract One: Rehearsal in Lesson 17 <sup>i</sup>

- 1 **P1: (Role of captain):** ‘You are now under arrest. ↑ Do you accept my leadership now?’↑
- 2 **P2: (Role of the guard):** You should speak louder, put some gesture, and behave seriously. (*pointing at the captive*)
- 3 **P1:** ‘You are now under arrest. ↑ Do you accept my >< leadership now?’ ↑ (*added a gesture*)
- 4 **P3 (Director):** More emotion! I think more emotion is better.
- 5 **T:** {You have to arrange the pose and gesture of each role to give the audience the impression of barracks.
- 6 **P4: (Role of captive):** You stand up and I kneel down before you. (*talking to P1*)
- 7 **P3:** No, you (P1) sit down and she (P4) kneels down before you.
- 8 **P4:** Perhaps, both of you pretend to send me away under guard.
- 9 **Ps:** Good.
- 10 **P3:** We should recite it.
- 11 **P2:** It is not good to hold the script in your hands.

Previous research conducted in Hong Kong and Taiwan pinpoint that the prevailing of performance-based practice is culturally shaped which results in the teacher’s mistaking drama pedagogy as performance. This mistaking might reduce drama pedagogy to mere training of acting and theatrical skills (Pang, 2001; Chou, 2007). Drawing on the theory of dialogue, these researchers’ worries and assumptions are explicable because performance activity is rooted in naturalistic drama in which the separation of stage and auditorium impedes audience participation and the recitation of script is inevitable. Nonetheless, the classroom discourse (Extract One) cited above portrays a counter picture of the pupils learning through the rehearsal activity. As shown, the pupils kept referring to and echoing the script by exploring, exercising and projecting their bodies and voices. They developed their plans

'on-the-fly' together, through building and rebuilding theirs as well as others' ideas. My observation over all the classrooms supports the argument that performance activity in the output phase ruptures the teacher's monologue and transforms the pupils' passivity and reticence in Chinese language classroom.

#### **4.2.3. Undertaking of particular activity**

Over 83% (19) of the study lessons used drama conventions. Amongst them, 'role play', 'teacher-in-role', 'writing-in-role' and 'still images' were frequently adopted for enhancing the pupils' vocabulary and literacy skills. Nevertheless, adoption of drama conventions in each lesson was selective and limited to one or two activities only instead of dramatic, holistic and consecutive integration. This piecemeal approach rendered incomplete the emergence of the dramatic space in classrooms in which pupils could 'reside' and 'live through'.

*[Insert]* Table Four: The numbers of particular activities

However, from the teacher's perspective, drama conventions provided the pupils with an authentic context of language use and an enjoyable learning experience. It is handy and flexible to combine drama conventions with other activities or insert them into other pedagogies as the time spent on performance is more demanding than practicing a single drama convention. It explains why the number of drama conventions used in the lessons was slightly higher than that of performance in this study. In terms of the frequency of use, teacher-in-role (63%) ranked top amongst all the drama conventions. Given the aim of this study is to examine teachers' approach to appropriating drama activity, the use of 'teacher-in-role' as integration and practice vis-a-vis other activities in the lesson, is discussed in detail in the next section.

#### **4.3. Integration of drama convention in a lesson**

Description of the various tasks and activities given in the previous section only portrays a big picture of the overall practice of the teachers' appropriation of drama activities in lessons. As analysed, even though drama activity such as performance and other drama conventions succeed in initiating a collaborative classroom, it by no means provides the necessary conditions for the total dialogic transformation of teaching. In view of this, by using examples of the application of 'teacher-in-role' in two classrooms, the next section further

illustrates the relation between various approaches to the application of drama activities, and the degree of dialogicality in teaching.

#### **4.3.1. The aim and features of teacher-in-role**

'Teacher-in-role' entails the teachers taking part directly in the drama. During the activity, the teacher will play a certain role and provoke the audience and the students to actively engage in responding to the performance (Morgan & Satxon, 1987; Neelands, 1995). However, the application of 'teacher-in-role' was far more complicated than defined. Issues concerning the power relation between teacher and student (Morgan and Satxon, 1987; Bolton, 1992) are a potential obstacle for drama appropriation.

Morgan and Satxon (1987) sketch a continuum of role statuses ranging from the high-status 'manipulator' to the low 'enabler'. The former has prominence over the story and wields ultimate power in the classroom. The latter adopts a non-intervening approach to facilitate real and substantial participation of the students. The continuum of Morgan and Satxon (*ibid.*) shows that 'teacher-in-role' does not necessarily lead to pupil participation. The teacher-manipulator in drama pedagogy would still be as dominant as the teacher in traditional instruction classroom. Notwithstanding, the examination of the teacher's authority and power in role playing should not leave the question of audience power unattended. After all, actors and audience come together to make up the theatre as a whole. This perspective shifts the discussion from what is the role played by the teacher/actor to how do pupils/audience participate. Considering that, Ackroyd (2004) proposes to transgress the boundary of the actor, i.e. the teacher who is in role and the audience i.e. the pupils who just watch and listen. As a matter of praxis, drama educators emphasize the importance of using drama to hand over the learning responsibility from the teacher to the learner (Bolton, 1992; Fleming, 2001). This implies the significance of soliciting the pupils' active participation and validating their language, knowledge and culture in 'teacher-in-role'. Henceforth, it is likely that the appropriation of 'teacher-in-role' would encounter great impediment in Chinese language classrooms. Indeed two divergent modes of monologic and dialogic 'teacher-in-role' are identified in the classroom study.

#### **4.3.2. Lesson 1: Monologic teacher-in-role**

The lesson under study and quoted in this section was about travel journal writing. The lesson was aimed at teaching the writing skills of narrative structure. The teacher played in role on two occasions for different teaching purposes. Not unlike the other lessons studied, this one did not deviate from the 'teacher-inputs → pupils output' formula. The following is a recap of the major features of the use of teacher-in-role in the lesson.

##### **Extract Two: Teacher-in-role in Lesson 1**

The teacher, Tom, took on the role of the tourist in the text ①. Acting as the tourist, he narrated the journey and described the landscape while asking questions to the pupils from time to time such as, '*What do you see?*', '*Is it wonderful?*', '*What was the first place I travel to...*'). In the second part of the lesson, some pupils were picked and asked to imitate different still objects such as a sculpture and a temple bell which appeared in the text. Tom acted out the role of the tourist again ②. This time his enactment was enriched by the participation of the pupils acting as the human 'backdrop' and giving out the 'sounds' of the objects they imitated.

If we evaluate the role of the tourist in Lesson 1, according to Morgan and Satxon's (1987) continuum of role statuses, the tourist is an authoritarian, manipulating and informative figure. First of all, Tom failed to change the pupils' role from the passive receiver, listener and audience to an active doer, communicator and creator. For most of the time in the lesson, the pupils remained as the watcher. Moreover, Tom's questions requested only fragmented and short responses from the pupils to check their attention level and understanding. Although some of the pupils were nominated to participate in the second episode (i.e. ②) and represent various scenic objects, their participation was predetermined firstly by the preset learning objectives; and secondly the separation of the stage and the auditorium which was straightly observed throughout the activity. The use of teacher-in-role in this lesson is a monologue which only demands a one-way response of the pupils to the dramatic performance and textbook's text represented by the teacher.

#### **4.3.3. Lesson 21: Dialogic teacher-in-role**

In Lesson 21, 'teacher-in-role' was applied three times in different episodes of the drama. The method was used in chosen instances to engage the pupils in examining the character and deeds of the protagonist of the text, Cheng Ban Kiu. Cheng is a very famous artist in the Qing dynasty. The lesson was meant to stimulate different perspectives from the pupils about Cheng and to construct their own opinion of Cheng. A closer look at the using of teacher-in-role tells how it was co-opted differently to fulfil the prescribed teaching objectives meanwhile transforming the monologic teaching.

### Extract Three: Teacher-in-role in Lesson 21

Teacher-in-role was first used when the teacher, Ben, ① acted out the role of Cheng to illustrate his benevolent character. Afterwards each pupil was assigned a role who had particular relation with Cheng such as a family member, a colleague, a friend, a teacher, a classmate, the King or a victim. After writing down their ideas, Ben ② acted as Cheng again and started short conversation with the different characters played by the pupils. The role play helped the pupils to create their own interpretation of Cheng so much so that by the end of the exercise Cheng became a controversial historical figure. Debate time was opened to listen to the other characters talk, and to reconsider one's opinions of Cheng before and after the role play. They were then asked to debate '*whether Cheng is a man of virtue or not*'. The pupils playing different roles were divided into affirmative and negative side according to their stance towards Cheng ③.

Throughout the role play, Cheng, albeit being the protagonist of the drama, did not appear to be threatening or dominant. In Episode ② and ③ in particular, the discussion was pupil-driven in which the pupils spoke more than Cheng/Ben did. When Ben acted out the role of Cheng, he played it down to a listener and observer rather than the speaker and actor. Throughout the process, he listened to and addressed pupils' responses rather spontaneously without holding onto any fixed answers, regulating the use of language or replicating the standard classroom communication. This 'letting go' of power gave way to a handover of authorial position from the teacher to the pupils. As a result, through active participation in creation, the pupils reconsidered, rewrote and retold the story of Cheng. The boundary between teacher and pupils or actor and audience was blurred and even broken down. A dialogical space was opened for promoting reciprocal, intensive and authentic interaction amongst the classroom participants. I argue that this lesson attains a high degree of dialogicality.

The dialogic theory elucidates the pedagogical conditions critical to the practice of 'teacher-in-role' and drama activity in general. They include namely the dichotomy of the actor and the audience, the authority of the teacher, the fixed relation between the teacher and pupil, the centrality of the text, the accustomed pattern of classroom interaction, and the prescription of the teachers for knowledge, language and literacy transmission. They altogether suggest that the appropriation of drama convention involves the transformation of classroom power relation, language, culture and epistemology. This may explain why in this study the monologic 'teacher-in-role' was much more commonly applied than the dialogic one. Nevertheless, one should avoid falling into the trap of dichotomizing the classrooms, and the study on appropriation is particularly valuable to overcome this binarism. Instead, I view monologism and dialogism as two ends of the spectrum of the teacher's appropriation of drama pedagogy, and in doing so the complicated tensions, overlappings and dynamics in between them is unveiled.

## **5. Discussion**

Based on the research findings which allow me to draw an initial conclusion of the patterns of Hong Kong teachers' integration of drama pedagogy, I examine and discuss how this western pedagogy is appropriated as a tool to transform the classroom. I attempt to answer this question in two senses. First of all, the degree of dialogicality (in each lesson) varies with the different approaches of appropriation. Secondly, such approaches and thereby the resultant degree of classroom transformation are shaped by the cultural challenges the teachers face.

### **5.1. Variations of dialogicality**

A spectrum of various degrees of dialogicality categorized into four modes is constructed for understanding the various hybrid approaches adopted in all the study classrooms (Diagram Three). The spectrum by no means is applied as a scale to evaluate the success or failure of individual teachers in appropriating the drama pedagogy. Quite the reverse, it is significant to illustrate how they wavered between persisting with monologue and embracing dialogue. Consequently, interplay between the dialogic and the monologic force is found in each study classroom which reflects conceptual and technical

resistance/appropriation of drama convention is synchronously intertwined.

Mode Four at the right end exemplifies a high level of dialogicality of drama pedagogy appropriation. Lesson 21 seems to have exhibited a dialogic transformation of the classroom compared to others. However, as mentioned before, such kind of dialogic appropriation is rare and infrequent (Table One, 13%), whereas nearly half of the studied classes fall into Mode Three demonstrating dialogicality but to a lesser extent. Similar patterns of mixed results are found at the other pole. For example an equal number of studied lessons fall into Mode Two with the teachers inserting at least one drama convention for preserving the bottom up model and the input and output formula. Despite that, compared with direct instruction, it lessens the degree of monologicality of Chinese language education. The interviewed teachers also agreed that even the inclusion of just a little bit of drama was able to transform the classroom a lot. From their perspective, classroom with drama was creative, dynamic and playful. This is affirmed as none of the studied classrooms was found without the integration of drama activity (Mode One). In other words, no classroom in this study was completely occupied by the teacher's monologue.

*[Insert] Diagram Three: Various degrees of dialogicality of the integration of drama pedagogy*

It is not the intention of this paper to diminish the significance of whole-class direct instruction or teacher-led talk but to discuss the ways to make the best use of the potential of drama pedagogy in transforming the very monologic classroom. In fact, observable changes in all the study classrooms are noted, such as choosing different class activities, validation of pupils' language, and altered organisation of space and patterns of communication. However, they do not necessarily lead to the authentic, comprehensive and dialogic transformation in Chinese language classroom (Kress et al., 2005; Tam, 2008). Considering this, in the next section, we will return to the socio-cultural perspective to discuss the contextual factors which hamper such transformation. For one thing, in-depth analysis of the socio-cultural context would prevent one from attributing the emergence of the monologic appropriation to the deficiency of the teacher. It also draws our attention to the relation between drama pedagogy and the socio-cultural context where it is applied. Accordingly, recommendations on cultural re-engineering and

development could be generated to improve the monologic-dialogic balance.

## **5.2. Cultural dilemma and development in appropriating drama pedagogy**

Many studies conducted across cultures find that there is a discrepancy between the teachers' integration of drama pedagogy and their recognition of it (ADC, 2005; Sæbø, 2004; Lin, 2008). Teachers on the one hand assert that drama pedagogy has great potential to transform the inveterate teaching practice; yet on the other hand they are faced with lots of difficulties of undertaking or sustaining its application in a comprehensive and thorough approach. To take a closer look at those difficulties, they were laden with technical issues which include limitations of time, lack of space, chaotic classroom order, large class sizes and the constraints of the curriculum. Comparable situations are also found in this research. Nonetheless, as mentioned, concern about the technical challenges in appropriating drama pedagogy should not bracket off the question of the teachers' conceptual appropriation of drama pedagogy. Indeed, the difficulties claimed by the teachers unmask their awareness and understanding of the cultural dilemma between adopting the drama pedagogy and the nature of the local school settings that they found themselves in. These difficulties in other words explain the kind of resistance on the part of the teachers that are closely connected to the limitations of the socio-cultural context they cannot overcome (Helsby, 1999; ADC, 2005). To verify this proposition, I would like to highlight the complexities of appropriating drama pedagogy.

It is obvious that classrooms in which drama pedagogy is being used are very complex spaces, in which a web of interrelated and interwoven factors and entities shapes the actual practice of teaching and learning. In Lesson 21, the teacher brought about a fictive world in the classroom which was playful, interlocutory, non-literal and liminal. As mentioned, it involved a long list of change items included teaching material, communication mode, relation between teacher and pupil, use of space, lesson structure and the target language and literacy. The learning from Lesson 21 reveals that dialogic appropriation of drama pedagogy does not only involve the insertion of one or two activities, or the replacement of a repertoire of activities, but reconceptualising and renovating Chinese language pedagogy and Chinese language itself in an open, spontaneous and pupil-centred manner. Therefore, the transformation that took place exemplifies the cultural development and

localization of an alien pedagogy.

Regarding the socio-cultural context in a broader sense, education reforms also account for another cultural dilemma that pushes the teachers to manoeuvre a hybrid approach of appropriation. As many local scholars point out, education reform seems to encourage, on the one hand, ideas of decentralism and transformation, yet, on the other hand, emphasises managerialism and quality assurance to reclaim the control of the government. In this circumstance, the teachers are inhibited by the accountability issue associated with the pupil-centred, laissez-faire approach to drama pedagogy. For this reason, this is a conscious decision made by the teachers viewing the hybrid approach as a pragmatic and manageable way of appropriating drama pedagogy. It explains why drama activities that target learning outcomes were much more widely used than those that emphasize learning processes. Such findings are analogous to Sæbø's (2004) research of the difficulties of Norwegian teachers in using DiE. Actually, many teachers in this study raised concerns over the dilemma of using drama pedagogy while also meeting the demands of the curriculum. The following comments were quite typical

I support using drama as a language teaching strategy very much, but...the reality is that we have many constraints; on the one hand, the curriculum is too tight, on the other hand, the assessment demands pupils demonstrate lots of skills. Without any changes to these demands, drama application is impossible. It becomes hollow. Take staging a play as an example. It is necessary to teach it in a playful way. However, if we only spend time playing, it is difficult to help pupils to learn the vocabulary and the text. To copy and recite is a must, otherwise, how can they meet the demands of the examination? (Interview Note, T6).

The subtext of the teacher's views is that drama pedagogy and the language learning it generates are auxiliary and peripheral. To account for this, what counts as literate and what is defined as relevant and important to Chinese language learning remains unchanged. These findings open up the question of why the language and literacy acquired from drama convention were not counted as 'outcomes'. It also shows the teacher's mediated perception of drama pedagogy between the demands of transformation and accountability. This is directly related to the various degree of dialogicality realised with drama pedagogy in the study classrooms. In fact, no pedagogy in itself is contributive

to dialogic learning but rather the people who use it. Drama pedagogy is no exception (Neelands, 2004). The teachers - as the major component of the classroom – and their beliefs, knowledge and perceptions towards drama pedagogy deserve further investigation.

## **Conclusion**

Scholars from cultural studies argue that the dialogue between Western and Eastern culture would open up the 'third space' where cultural exchange instead of cultural conquest takes place (Bhabha, 1994). Drawing on the theories of the third space, the Taiwanese drama scholar (Lin, 2008) anticipates that the appropriation of DiE could generate a third place for cultural dialogue and hence transformation. From this cultural exchange point of view, the hybrid approach, especially in a way of monologic appropriation, found in this study is largely partial, nominal and perfunctory. In Eco's words, it belongs to a kind of 'cultural pillage' (1998, p.70), that is the members of a culture tend to subjugate another culture from across an exotic distance by '*translating its elements into their own*' (ibid.). From the above analysis, it is quite evident that under the pressure of the education reform the teachers in this study were looking for something that they felt more comfortable to adapt while hesitating or eluding a holistic transformation. Despite that, a real and holistic transformation does not happen in a single step or individual occasion of appropriating drama. Considering that the teachers were novices at using drama pedagogy, it is tactical for them to adopt the hybrid approach of appropriation. It should be viewed as a more affordable and practical option to support the teacher to sustain the appropriation and to further proceed with the dialogic one. Cultural pillage, in this case, is only a transition to or compromise with cultural exchange. It is necessary to highlight the conceptual as well as the cultural aspect of appropriation, and review the possibility and constraint of the socio-cultural context of Hong Kong in relation to the importation of drama pedagogy.

In this study, engagement in the field lead me to learn that cultural dialogue and classroom transformation is a complex and gradual process of growth and it should not be taken for granted with the use of drama. Besides, to bring about a dialogic space of practicing drama, technical issues may not be the most significant aspect to be considered. Instead, the cultural changes of the teachers themselves, as well as those of the classroom and the social

settings where teaching and learning happen are more vital. The analysis of the relation between cultural dilemmas, and the subsequent emergence of a hybrid approach in adopting drama in classrooms, suggests the necessity for a holistic Chinese language education. Taking into consideration that drama pedagogy is still at the initial stage of its development, I argue that the appropriation of drama pedagogy should be understood as progressive stages of development which may start with cultural pillage to cultural development. Moreover, in-depth study of the DiE approach should be undertaken in order to understand at least the interplay between the agent, the pedagogy and the context that facilitates dialogic transformation.

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#### Notes:

Transcription code:

↑: indicates low rising tone  
{ : signifies overlapping speech  
><: signals a faster delivery  
!: indicates an animated tone  
“”: drama script

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