

Embracing Future Theatre-makers

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Since 2017, the School of Drama has been talking to different stakeholders, referencing different models, surveys and studies to come up with a new drama curriculum to cater for the needs of our future theatre-makers. Our Dean of the School of Drama, Professor Poon Wai-sum put it nicely, “Theatre professionals today need depth and breadth – they must be specialised in their respective fields, yet armed with a broad knowledge base and a sweeping vision. Comprehensive training allows them to create their own unique worlds.”

In the next 10 minutes, I will share with you some essential aspects we consider vital to the future theatre-makers, and how our curriculum embraces them.

Essential Aspects #1 Holistic Training

First of all, holistic training. When I was a secondary student many decades ago, I used to think that there were only 3 positions in the drama world, namely the playwright, the director and the actor -- but of course the spectrum of a drama career is much wider and diversified than that! In our new curriculum, we have expanded our existing 2 majors in Directing and Acting by adding 3 new majors to offer students a more holistic professional training. They are Acting for Musical, Applied Theatre and Dramaturgy. Let me briefly introduce them to you.

New Major #1 Acting for Musical

Apart from the training of acting, singing and dancing, this exciting new curriculum also puts emphasis on ways of storytelling. Thorough understanding of the nature, history and development of musical performance will enable students to have a better understanding of the playwrights’ and composers’ inner worlds. As more large-scaled performance venues are built in the West Kowloon district, the Mainland, and other places in Asia, we can foresee the vast demand for new musical theatre works and skillful performers. Potential students in this new major have to be talented and passionate in musicals. They must also be very hardworking and willing to commit themselves to years of blood and sweat to achieve the very high artistic standard set by the School.

New major #2 Applied Theatre

Applied Theatre is an umbrella term for the application of drama approaches to working with different target groups in educational and communal settings. In a recent survey, Applied Theatre is the second largest sector of work that our graduates engage themselves in. The demand is obviously very high. The interdisciplinary nature of Applied Theatre is manifested in its many forms and rationales, such as theatre-in-education, process drama, forum theatre, drama therapy, etc.

Empowerment is the heart of Applied Theatre work and usually the audience does not just sit back and watch, but also participate in the process and have ownership of the artwork. Love for the theatre is crucial for

potential students, but social consciousness, caring for the society and the wish to give voice to the unvoiced are equally important. Students will be equipped with professional theatre knowledge and skills, as well as those of education, psychology, ethnography, and cultural studies.

New major #3 Dramaturgy

Dramaturgy originated in the 18th century in Germany. It is very well developed in Europe and the US, but it's relatively new in Hong Kong. The School's unique dramaturgy curriculum is not totally the same as those offered elsewhere, which focuses mainly on literature, but incorporates international collaborations across disciplines, professional fields, and cultures. Dramaturgy is sometimes described as the director's second pair of eyes, assisting the director to deepen and contextualise a work from various angles. This dramaturgy involves much more than a series of tasks but also the right mindset and vision. Potential students in Dramaturgy should be able to work with different creative teams and collaborators. This programme covers interdisciplinary and cross-cultural theatre production, curation and performance text creation to prepare students for their multi-directional career.

Our new holistic curriculum offers students a comprehensive training in all aspects related to the theatre. A renowned scholar described that the new generations of theatre-makers "does not occupy only one definition of the existing professional profiles as actor, writer, director, designer, composer, and choreographer. Instead, they usually take on more than one of these roles in an integrated way." Our students from all 5 majors will share a common curriculum in the first year, so that they can learn the essential concepts from each specialisation. They will also be collaborating in various projects throughout their studies. This flexible identity will definitely increase their competitiveness in the field.

Essential Aspects #2 Entrepreneurship

The second essential aspect which is vital to our future theatre-makers is entrepreneurship. Theatre makers should not be waiting passively for jobs but proactively creating and developing their own career. Across all the 5 majors in our new curriculum, we have built-in internships and modules for students to explore the industry in authentic settings.

Essential Aspects #3 Interdisciplinarity

There is a global trend of working across different disciplines, such as between art forms, or between art and non-art disciplines. It opens up a huge number of possibilities for theatre-makers to expand their careers. The School sees the interdisciplinary skills as highly transferable and demanded in a globalised working context.

To conclude, our future theatre-makers will enjoy a more proactive and flexible identity through our renewed curriculum emphasising on holistic training, entrepreneurship, and interdisciplinary collaborations.

As educators, we all care about the young generation. You can help to identify their drama talents and show them the new pathways to develop their unique strengths.