

Education Innovation

Chee-Hoo Lum *Editor*

Contextualized Practices in Arts Education

An International Dialogue on Singapore

 Springer

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Springer Education Innovation Book Series

Series Editors

Wing On LEE
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Aims and Scope – Springer Education Innovation Book Series

Education holds the key to unlock human resources that a society needs to survive and flourish. This is particularly salient in a borderless knowledge economy. For the past decades, the sterling performance of economies such as Hong Kong, Finland, Japan, Singapore and Taiwan in international studies (e.g. TIMSS, PIRLS and PISA) has channeled much attention away from the traditional centers of education research in America and Western Europe. Researchers, policy makers and practitioners all over the world wish to understand how education innovations propel the emerging systems from good to great to excellent, and how different their trajectories were compared to the systems in America and Western Europe.

The Education Innovation Book Series, published by Springer, will delve into education innovations enacted by the Singapore education system and situate them in both the local and the boarder international contexts. Primary focus will be given to pedagogy and classroom practices; education policy formulation and implementation; school and instructional leadership; and the context and interface between education research, policy and practice. We believe that the latter is critical in making education innovations come to bear. Each volume will document insights and lessons learned based on empirical research (both quantitative and qualitative) and theoretical analyses. Implications to research, policy and professional practice will be surfaced through comparing and synthesizing Singapore's experience with those of successful systems around the world.

The audience of the edited volumes and monographs published in this series includes researchers, policy makers, practitioners, and students in the fields of education and teacher education, and public policies related to learning and human resources.

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Series Editors' Foreword

As series editors, we are tremendously proud to announce the fourth book in our Springer Education Innovation Series on Singapore's Arts Education. This book represents an effort describing and discussing how the education system privileges the Arts in the present twenty-first century context of innovation and globalisation. Educational Innovation is not always characterised by the sciences or in engineering, but the spirit of the Arts in rich cultures and practices exhibiting the diversity of perspectives, and expressivity is one which offers new insights to imagination and creativity.

It is heartening to note that the exemplary case studies described and discussed in this book shows that Singapore—although nascent in the Arts—is moving in trajectories which are productive and forward looking when compared internationally. The Arts methodology of juxtaposing the involvements of the creative-critical and reflective-reflexive perspectives is note-worthy of learning from other disciplines, through which artistic products are created from the process. The Arts also bring to the foreground the individual expressivity and creativity through this process-methodology which schools in Singapore can harness. Such learnings are especially manifested when schools form local and international partnerships with practicing artists. These artists work hand-in-hand with students through which embodied experiences are formed and valuable dispositions in the aesthetics are formed.

Indeed Arts and innovation is a productive interplay which can contribute to the well being of the student. The aesthetics and the humanistic designs which are so critical today should be developed in our students as a twenty-first century literacy regardless of their future pursuits. The Singapore Education System is one of the few systems in the world which has systematically embraced Arts into the curriculum for all schools, and this book has provided reflective insights into this journey of reform.

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Foreword

Ways Forward in Arts, Education and Culture

This book embraces the arts, education and culture. As a tripartite operation with historical roots and a natural evolution to the present moment, it holds principles and premises of significance to artists, teachers, and cultural agents. Its three-dimensional dynamic is at once Singaporean-local in its focus on the particularities of the progressive island-nation as it also is cross-culturally universal, in that local issues are directly relevant to the teaching and learning of the arts in national settings across the globe. This volume offers a dialogue on teaching and learning music, dance, the visual arts, theatre, and the art of storytelling in ways that balance philosophy and practice, and traditions and transformations. It is relevant reading for those who are committed to the future of the arts in society and its schools. Anywhere.

Singapore is alive in the arts. The sparkling gem of a city at the southeastern edge of Asia, it shines in all of its artistic glory to its citizens and to waves of international visitors annually. While there are clear indications of governmental support with the prime intent of financial return through tourism and the attraction of foreign investors into the country, it would seem that the brilliant expressions by masterful artists benefit all citizens of the nation, including the young. The commitment by Singapore to the support of a continuous engagement in the arts for school-aged children and youth is surely noteworthy in these global times of fiscal uncertainties and the consequent reduction of the scope of education programs (that have far too often resulted in the exclusion of the arts in schools). That Singapore has invested in arts education, and that it takes seriously the evolution of its cultural policy as hinged to arts education, is inspiring to artists and educators in the arts everywhere. The intrigue is certainly there, to know the frameworks that undergird and uphold the arts in Singaporean culture, to understand the systems that foster the arts in schools, and to recognize that as no society is truly utopian, even Singapore has its own growing pains in providing quality education in the arts in ways that are integrative and abiding.

As all societies are in flux, each with its own set of growing pains and context-specific challenges, a view of the situation of the arts and arts education in Singapore is not only a case in its own right but also a window to the wider world of the arts, education and culture. Enter this volume, conceived of by artist, educator, and scholar Chee Hoo Lum, who has assembled those within and beyond Singapore to describe, analyze and interpret the current state of affairs regarding school arts programs, the content and process of these programs, the preparation and continued professionalization of teachers charged with responsibility for the development of children's creative-expressive practices, and the pedagogical pathways that genuinely connect children to the arts and artists for experiences with the potential to last a lifetime.

We need only to consider a single issue—the diverse cultural traditions that comprise a nation's artistic-expressive spectrum—as one of many matters at hand) to recognize the clear-and-present tensions there are for those who envision a relevant and cogent school curriculum in the arts. Within the limitations of a teacher's preparation and the hours of a school day whose curricular goal is a broad and representative curriculum, whose artistic expressions shall be threaded into school music classes to impact children's expressive development? For the culturally diverse nation of Singapore, shall traditional Chinese orchestras be established in schools? Filipino kulintang? Western-styled concert bands of winds, brass and percussion? Curricular units in the traditional songs and dances of the Malay population, and group lessons on Indian tabla? All these (and more) engagements are already in play in Singapore, and since these decisions are not so easily made at any given school, one choice may negate the presence of another and not all musical cultures will be in evidence even in curricular practice where equity is claimed as an important value. Knowledge of Singapore's reasoned responses to its diverse population in content decisions, and of its reconsiderations in view of current research and reflection, is provocative for sorting through reasons as to how these complexities are wrestled with there and elsewhere in the world.

Somewhat independent of questions of content within a program of the arts for a society and its schools are the processes by which people encounter and become thoroughly engaged in the arts. From adults in the public sector who informally experience the arts, to students learning the nature of the arts through prescribed classroom encounters, to highly motivated students who are intensively involved in honing a serious set of arts skills (such as at Singapore's arts-infused SOTA), process merits careful attention. Process encompasses analytical and holistic pathways, oral and literate channels, kinesthetic approaches that balance the mind-body dualism, and didactic and heuristic realms of instructional practice.

In Singapore as elsewhere, both specialist and non-specialist teachers are charged with the responsibility for teaching the arts, and the extent of preparation, supervision, and genuine assistance to these teachers very well influences the extent to which artistic experiences can be meaningful. ("Arts-light" activities, in which the arts function as time-fillers and entertainment pieces, too often result when teachers are insufficiently prepared in the art form and in the pedagogical techniques that are suitable to the students and the chosen art.) Teachers deserve support

in the rediscovery of process: They deserve a spread of occasions to be thoughtful, reflexive, resourceful, and wondrous of the “what-ifs” that happen when the constraints of traditional ways of teaching give way to the facilitation of learning in ways that students find appealing. The Singapore Teachers’ Academy for the aRts (STAR) provides points for departure and possible transfer into other settings, as it delves into (and documents) transformative processes in teaching and learning, acting upon the recognition of teachers as active agents of change. Attention to the preparation of teachers in the arts, and continuing assistance to them as they make their daily way in service to students, are key to insuring that the arts will continue to benefit students—and society—in profound ways.

It’s fair to say that when it comes to the arts, education and culture, Singapore bears watching—by Singaporeans and by those far distant from the South China Sea. This volume opens a pathway for exploring arts education within the context of schools in a society that has embraced the arts as human expression of the beauty, joy, sorrow, angst, and so much more. It offers an examination of art as experienced in performance and as visual expression, and it analytically takes to task what has been achieved while also opening up honestly to what has not been accomplished. It presents provocative opportunities for consideration by arts educators of every form and context. As Singaporeans steam ahead with ways to weave the arts into the lives of children and youth in their everyday world of learning, these chapters offer moments of repose, reflection, and reconsideration. We do well to look and listen to Singapore for its philosophical frameworks for arts engagement in schools, its articulation in cultural policy, its educational practices in classrooms and communities, and its research and recommendations for change.

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Preface

Rationale and Aims of the Book

Jean Luc Nancy (2003) suggests that every culture is “in itself ‘multicultural’ . . . a melee that within any ‘culture’ brings out a style or a tone; equally, however, it brings out the various voices or vocal ranges that are needed in order for this tone to be interpreted” (p. 283). Nancy also suggests that every culture, singularly drawn or drawn among other cultures, shares two properties: *having-in-common* and *being-in-common*.

These properties are even more poignant in a discussion of arts education around the world. With burgeoning interest in arts education as situated and lived/living practice, we note a paucity of treatises that focus on Southeast Asian perspectives of pedagogies and practices, particularly in understanding how communities of arts-practices across this region engage *through* education. This is all the more given more recent colonial provenance of the Southeast Asian region socially, culturally, economically and politically speaking. While contemporary practices secrete policies involving *privileged presence* of post- and neo-colonial infrastructures, it is the practices as locally situated which best underscore the impermeability of policy.

A book focusing on arts education practices in Singapore is not an example of insularity or even cultural essentialist discourse. As of January 2011, 3.8 million (about 74.29 %) of the five million people residing in Singapore are Singapore citizens or permanent residents; slightly more than one out of four persons living in this city-nation is neither citizen nor permanent resident (Singapore Government Statistics 2011). Given Singapore’s current demographic reality, *having-in-common* and *being-in-common* takes on a very different significance when commonly shared not only includes basic amenities and opportunities but also access to education, culture, social networks and practices of the Arts.

This edited book hopes to contribute by addressing the growing interest in and importance of localised context within arts education practices, making *context* therefore, a central theme in coming to terms *with* a broader understanding of the arts and arts education as global and glocal policy and practice. The book seeks to

provide a vehicle for the dissemination of research findings from case studies and autoethnographies about exemplary arts teaching in Singapore and provide a platform to negotiate generalities and particularities, global and local, formal and informal, through exegetical commentaries and critical dialogue between the local and regional/international discourse within each chapter. The situatedness of all chapters within a specific geographical location, lived and living practices in Singapore, drawing on the myriad network of social, cultural and historical contexts of the arts and arts education in Singapore, serves as points of departure engendering international dialogue on arts education.

The research narratives also point to the strengths in Singapore's positioning of arts education through government support in the last decade, propelling a string of initiatives that springboard development of arts education towards: (i) a robust creative and critical thinking arts curriculum; (ii) development of high-quality school arts ensembles; (iii) arts learning through technology and multimodalities; (iv) embodied learning in the arts; (v) the establishment of a specialized arts school; (vi) active reflective inquiry in arts pedagogy and practice towards learner-centered possibilities; and (vii) a thinking-through and negotiation about an arts identity grounded in localised, Asian and global perspectives.

Context in Arts Education

The meaning of any art form is tied closely to the context in which the arts making happen. Arts education, by association, is not simply transmission of "facts" but an education that is deeply embedded within social and cultural contexts. Culture as Nieto (1999 as cited in McCarthy 2009) explains, "is not static, and cultures are always hybrid and multifaceted; embedded in context; influenced by a broad array of social, economic, and political factors; full of inherent tensions; and constantly being constructed by human beings" (p. 30). Beyond considering the complexities by which social and cultural contexts constantly change forms of that art and its practice, an arts educator needs also to consider the complexities of the arts classroom, "a site of multiple subcultures based on ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, religious tradition, and generational difference" (McCarthy 2009, p. 30). The arts educator also needs to be cognizant and reflective about his/her context, to be clear and honest of a particular situatedness: acknowledging influences of academic and arts training and be mindful of his/her identity in the arts anchored in a complex range and interaction of variables. What Glover and Hoskyns (2006) illustrate through music educators and musicians at work, is the way

each [would] have learned their skills through a different mixture of self-teaching, alone or with peers, formal or informal tuition, apprenticeship, periods of part or full time study and learning 'on the job' through regular performing or participation in groups or bands. Rock and pop, folk and traditional, classical and jazz musical styles are each rooted in different learning styles and teacher-learner relationships, as are different instrumental or vocal

traditions. Each tradition brings with it a form of discourse, practice and learning assumptions that musicians import into their work with young people (p. 85).

The Significance of Context

The word ‘context’ is derived from the Latin verb *contexere* which means “to weave together”, (The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary 2007). Understanding and interpreting context is central, if not crucial, to social and cultural anthropology and has taken significance over recent years in other academic disciplines including education and in this instance, arts education. But what is the meaning of *context* in arts education and how is it defined and selected and by whom?

To contextualize is also to frame, “it is our sense of relevance, driven by our theoretical outlooks and practical dispositions towards the work, that defines where these frames are to be placed” (Dilley 2002, p. 454). Taking the cue from social and cultural anthropology, there are two processes of construing context

for us within our own bodies of knowledge; and for them within theirs. The conjunction of these parallel processes in the course of fieldwork or in our writing about the field and its subsequent dissemination to other readers may generate further contexts of knowledge through a dialogical relationship. . .but context is expandable, infinitely so; and we must never lose sight of the fact that a claim about context is precisely that- an articulation concerning a set of connections and disconnections thought to be relevant to a specific agent that is socially and historically situated, and to a particular purpose (p. 454).

The interest here involves a contextual framing that places the arts educator and the arts classroom as a specific site for contemplation about pedagogies and practices. Through the rich, thick descriptions in the case studies and autoethnographic accounts, one begins to see an expansive and changeable arts education context of global and local flows that weaves into the glocal, of colonial and postcolonial positionings, of a tugging between the formal and informal, and the uneasiness of letting go of generalities to the ambiguity of particularities vital to negotiating artistic processes *in and of* learning.

To stay relevant and meaningful as authors and authorisers of their context, arts educators must constantly re-think, re-analyze and re-frame their processes and engagement with the arts, to always contextualize and situate their practices in the arts classroom in view of changing sociocultural and demographic contexts. This edited book begins by amplifying the multiple yet understated nuances in particular contexts within arts education practices in Singapore and critically reviews these practices through an exegetical commentary and critical dialogue between each chapter author and a regional/international scholar. The outcome for the reader, it is hoped, will generate further contexts of knowledge in arts education because of the dialogical relationship purposefully created within the structure of the book.