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Rethinking the relationship between applied theatre and policy

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ABSTRACT
There has been a longstanding concern about the relationships between policy, funding and theatre practice in educational and community settings. Past scholarship has made evident the varied ways a relationship with policy can manifest and play out in the political, pedagogic, aesthetic and ethical values, approaches and outcomes of applied theatre practices. This includes the ways theatre can play a part in producing the problems it intends to address. This article argues for the use of critical theories to interrogate and rethink the policy-funding-practice relationship, to generate nuanced understandings and open up a space of possibility.

KEYWORDS
Assemblage; discourse; funding; policy; social justice

The relationship between applied theatre, applied performance and policy is both complex and intimate. As transdisciplinary practices, drama education and applied theatre typically happen in places governed by policy (public and institutional) and are also oriented towards social or policy 'problems'. Practices bring policy-infused messages or meanings to participants, communities, and audiences, intentionally and unintentionally. There are also traditions of applied theatre with explicit intentions to develop and inform policy, including Boal's Legislative Theatre, while other practices challenge or resist policies and their effects on communities and ecologies. Applied theatre projects often simultaneously advance, support, develop and resist different policy agendas, making the relationship between policy and practice particularly complex to understand and negotiate. This themed issue stems from the argument that multiple theoretical and methodological approaches are needed to interrogate and rethink this relationship. This argument builds on the longstanding concern with understanding the relationships between policy, funding and theatre practice in institutional and community settings (Kershaw 1999; Jackson 1993; Neelands 2007; Hughes and Ruding 2009; Mullen 2019). This editorial, and the issue as a whole, proposes a range of approaches to understanding the policy-funding-practice relationship in its complexity, drawing attention to the operation of power, participation and politics.

Past scholarship has made evident the intricate ways in which a relationship with policy agendas can manifest and play out in the political, pedagogic, aesthetic and ethical

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values, approaches and outcomes of applied theatre practices. There is a growing recognition that policies from the political or institutional context in which work takes place (health, education, criminal justice, community/international development) can affect intentions, approach and outcomes. Policies can catalyse projects into existence, play a part in who gets to run and participate in projects or programmes, inform the topics, issues or themes of the drama/theatre/performance, influence the creative approach taken, affect the relationships between facilitators and participants and between participants, and shape ideas about what outcomes are desirable or beneficial. Policy then is not just integrated into the applied theatre from the outside, it is intimately tied to the orientation of the field. And the participatory processes of applied theatre, performance and drama education can be understood as making and remaking policies all the time. When examining the operation of power and politics in the policy-practice relationship, then, the nature or direction of causal effect cannot be assumed.

The relationship with policy is a source of political and practical tension for applied theatre, performance and drama education makers. Complicated negotiations can be required between competing notions of what is valuable, 'effective' or 'successful' within and across different policies. Tensions can arise when institutional or public policy agendas conflict with the needs or desires of participants, practitioners or partners. Policies define problems. So, whether intentional or not the orientation of applied theatre towards policies means this field is prone to problematising participants (as marginalised, as silenced, as in need of education) and specific social 'problems' (such as violence, drug addiction, unsafe partying practices and so on). Theatre makers in particular contexts (such as prisons) may use policies to rationalise their work and to connect the work to the context (both the physical context and the policy context), but this may have the effect of having the policy context 'overwhelm and instrumentalize the theatre work in such a way as to reduce the very qualities of the work that brought them into the context in the first place' (Balfour and Freebody 2018, 21). Policy relationships affect participants, their experience of the work and the terms of their engagement with it. Policy can also impact the nature of facilitators' labour and positionality. In practice, then, policy has profound effects on applied theatre, applied performance, and drama education practitioners. The articles in this volume expand current thinking about these effects and how they might be negotiated.

What is policy?

In the broadest sense, policy proposes or establishes 'goals, values and practices' as the basis for a particular course of action (Laswell and Kaplan 1950, cited in Rosenstein 2018, 13). But exactly what policy is and how (or even whether) it gets things done is widely debated. Commonly, when someone refers to 'a policy', they mean a specific text, a policy document, or a statement. But, a policy can take many forms, often simultaneously. Policy can refer to government or 'public policy', encompassing laws, statutes, legislation, regulations, strategic plans, and so on. It can also refer to a wide range of proposals and processes for action in various social and private institutions, 'the dynamic and value-laden process through which political systems operate to solve problems at the institutional level' (Allan, Iverson, and Ropers-Huilman 2009, 4). We can also think about less formal personal policy, principled ways of doing things and behaving within groups, families or as individuals. Different forms of policy are often highly contingent

on each other and all have relevance to and implications for applied theatre and drama education and understanding the ways drama and theatre play a part in extending policy well beyond government and into people's everyday lives.

This special edition approaches policy as complex relationships between multiple texts, statements, practices and technologies; as containing a range of competing principles or objectives; and as highly contingent on context for meaning and effect. An example of such an approach to policy is evident in performance studies scholar Paul Bonin-Rodriguez's (2014) definition of cultural policy '[a]s a set of decisions (by both private and public entities) that either directly or indirectly shape the environment in which the arts are created, disseminated, and consumed, … an admixture of ongoing political, social, and economic projects' (2). This quote describes the way phenomena, such as culture, are being continuously shaped by multiple policies, not all of which are intentionally directed at that phenomenon. Cultural policy scholar David Throsby (2009, 179) differentiates between explicit policy, which deals directly with its area of concern such as culture or health, and implicit policy, which influences an area of concern indirectly but 'the overt intention of the policy [is] being directed elsewhere'. The transdisciplinary nature of applied theatre in particular, means that the practice and participants can be caught within multiple imperatives coming from different implicit and explicit policies. Those creating drama education and applied theatre face the challenge of discerning the ways in which the issues addressed by their practice, and the participants involved in it are represented or 'problematised' in contradictory and intersecting ways within and across policies. In this editorial, we suggest critical, theoretical perspectives to both understand what policy is and the multiple ways it interrelates with drama, theatre and performance.

Allan, Iverson, and Ropers-Huilman (2009, 4) propose that different conceptions of policy are based in different philosophical views of 'the nature and roles of society, power, and government'. We suggest three conceptions of policy, as discourse, as assemblage and as part of participatory democracy. Each of these lenses provide useful ways of understanding the nature of policy and the operation of power and agency in the relationship between policy and practice in our fields. In arguing for these ways of considering policy and applied theatre, we are not suggesting an 'all in' approach that sees all perspectives diluted into one view. Rather, we are advocating for a nuanced understanding of how different philosophical perspectives ask and answer different questions about the relationship between applied theatre and policy. Knowing which questions are useful and relevant in different contexts, we argue, is a central component of a critical understanding of this relationship.

Policy as discourse

In a seminal article, *What is policy? Texts, trajectories and toolboxes*, education researcher Stephen J. Ball (1993) proposes two different ways of understanding policy, 'as text' and 'as discourse' (10). In the latter, he considers how policies 'exercise power through a *production* of "truth" and "knowledge", as discourses' (14). Ball uses discourse in the Foucauldian sense of 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault 1977, 49, as cited in Ball 1993, 14). Discourses, in this sense, are not purely linguistic but conceived as 'bodies of knowledge' that 'define the terrain' (Bacchi 2000, 48). The lens of

policy as discourse is useful for understanding how policies exercise power by defining the terrain of what it is possible and/or desirable to think, say, do and be (Ball 1993; Bacchi 2009). This perspective conceives of policy as a technology of governmentality, in which 'discourse [functions] as a contemporary form of power that seeks to govern populations and individuals through the "micro"-practices of their everyday conduct' (Chouliaraki 2008, 32).

One way in which policy as discourse governs is through the regulation of identity and social relations via the production of subjectivities. As Ball explains,

> We do not speak a discourse, it speaks us. We are the subjectivities, the voices, the knowledge, the power relations that a discourse constructs and allows. We do not 'know' what we say, we 'are' what we say and do. (Ball 1993, 14)

From this perspective, the categorisation of some people as 'at risk' or 'vulnerable' is not a neutral description of reality by policy texts, but the discursive construction of subjectivities to enable disciplinary control. Understanding policy as discourse illuminates the ways policy discourses come together with institutional practices to make particular subject positions legitimate, prominent and accessible (Allan, Iverson, and Ropers-Huilman 2009).

A second way in which policy as discourse governs is through problematisation (Bacchi 2009). As Osborne (1997, 174) states, 'policy cannot get to work without problematising its territory'. Policy is, therefore, typically 'orientated toward a problem or set of problems' and to the task of fixing that problem (Rosenstein 2018, 13). There is debate, however, about whether the policy is a pragmatic response to the need to solve objectively identifiable problems or whether *problems* are produced or 'constituted' via the discursive practices of policy (Bacchi 2009). The way problems are represented or defined in the policy as 'real' or 'self-evident' is highly political as it can make particular kinds of change more or less difficult (Bacchi 2009). Under neoliberalism, for example, the discursive practices of policy have tended to represent individuals as both the problem and responsible for solving the problem (Freebody et al. 2018).

We have argued previously that applied theatre scholars and practitioners should critically consider how their work is positioned within these discursive practices (Freebody et al. 2018; Freebody and Goodwin 2017). Applied theatre programmes, particularly those funded by or aligned to particular policy initiatives, often present the social problem under examination as a particular kind of problem, solvable by the applied theatre initiative. This makes sense, the nature of applied work is for us to apply our theatre work to create some kind of change or engagement with and for participants. However, the experiential nature of applied theatre also naturally orients the change in the participants themselves rather than the social and institutional structures the participants interact with. Programmes funded by a policy initiative that aims to engage more women in the workforce after parental leave that use theatre and drama to improve participants' confidence present the 'problem' of disengagement in work as one related to the women themselves, specifically their confidence levels. This silences other potential issues – access to childcare, discrimination in workplaces, lack of flexible working arrangements and so on. Similarly, an applied theatre programme that works with young people in rural Uganda to develop health messages and encourage their community to wash their hands and maintain hygiene to stop the spread of intestinal worms, situates the

'problem' of intestinal worms in the people themselves (specifically in their lack of knowledge about hygiene) as opposed to more structural influences such as lack of clean water and health infrastructure (Freebody and Goodwin 2018). Again, this makes sense as developing knowledge about healthy washing practices is something that can be achieved through an applied theatre programme, whereas the building of roads and dismantling systemic poverty is a more complex process. Nonetheless, applied theatre programmes that draw on funding sources and policy initiatives, engage in discursive practices that constitute their participants and the 'problem' in particular ways. This is inevitable rather than problematic, and we do not wish to suggest it should not happen. However, we do stress that it is not morally or politically neutral.

The lens of policy as discourse is particularly useful for understanding how applied theatre and drama education acts as, or in conjunction with, policies in the construction of subjectivities and issues, to facilitate governance of what it is possible for participants, practitioners and audiences to say and do within and beyond the drama/theatre/performance practice. In this issue, Ananda Breed, Kirrily Pells, Matthew Elliot and Tim Prentki consider how the policy operates as a form of governmentality, drawing on post-structural understandings of the relationship between policy proposals and theatre work. Drawing on both Ball (1993) and Bacchi (2009), they critically consider the role of performance as an opportunity for an agency in policy-making processes as well as the potential for such work to reproduce unequal power structures. Their article explores an arts-based peacebuilding project that engaged young people in policy-making processes. The Mobile Arts for Peace project worked alongside civil society organisations in Rwanda to consider some of the varied opportunities to research the use of participatory arts for youth-centred approaches to civil society building in post-conflict societies. Breed and colleagues provide detailed examples of both the applied theatre practices and the policy brief that emerged as a key outcome of the project, while engaging in a critical discussion of the relationship between young people, policy-making, and participatory arts. Taking a different approach, but still concerned with the application of policy discourses, Xunnan Li's contribution provides perspectives on an issue rarely considered in applied theatre and drama education scholarship, how cultural policy in China establishes and applies a Chinese-style neoliberalism to Chinese theatres.

Policy as assemblage

Policy can be viewed through the lens of assemblage thinking, adopting a relational ontology to understand entities as emerging from contingent and dynamic relationships. This lens offers an expanded conception of what policy is and challenges hierarchical, deterministic understandings of power and causality in policy-practice relationships. Baker and McGuirk (2017) explain how assemblages can 'include arrangements of humans, materials, technologies, organisations, techniques, procedures, norms, and events, all of which have the capacity for agency within and beyond the assemblage' (428). The parts of an assemblage can be simultaneously local and 'extra local' (McCann and Ward 2012). Conceiving of policy as assemblage expands the focus of policy analysis beyond human actors, beyond particular texts or statements, and across scales and temporalities. Analytic emphasis is placed on how human and non-human entities are drawn together and arranged over space and time to produce particular affects and effects.

In terms of the relationship between policy and applied theatre/drama education practice, assemblage thinking draws attention to the multi-directional and 'counter intuitive' flows of power and influence between different elements, only some of which are human, such as official public policies, philanthropic funding criteria, technologies for applications and reporting, an applied theatre company, the company's business plan, workshop plans, freelance theatre makers, young people, and so on. Baker and McGuirk stress assemblage thinking involves understanding phenomena as multiply determined/ing and an 'insistence on non-linearity and contingency' (430). Assemblage, then, thinking disrupts linear models of causality, influence or change that continue to impinge on applied theatre and drama education. Helen Nicholson (2016, 252–253) has proposed previously, assemblage thinking emphases change 'as integral to relational bodies and everyday life', change is imminent in any 'theatrical encounter' not an after effect. Rather than transformation or change as something finite that happens within or as a result/effect of a theatrical encounter, it is understood as a constant, multi-directional process.

Deleuze and Guattari's concepts, including territorialisation, de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation, are useful for examining the dynamics of power and agency in policy assemblages. The concepts relate to the ways assemblages are co-produced by processes aiming for stability/fixing/order and processes aim for change and disorder (Sarmiento 2020). By making a particular claim about the world, for example, that youth are 'at risk' or that the main purpose of education is employment, policy assemblages create temporarily stabilised territories. De-territorialisation involves the various processes through which the order and control of a territory is undone as elements are removed, leak, flow away from or otherwise escape a territory. The ongoing process of de-territorialisation and re-territorialsation resonates with the highly dynamics observed as arts organisations struggle to sustain their practice in ever-changing social, cultural and political conditions.

Drama education and applied theatre can be part of multiple processes of de- and re-territorialisation simultaneously. This is evident in studies such as Lambert et al.'s (2017) study of the relationship between neoliberal education policy and secondary drama classrooms. The authors carefully detail how material and immaterial elements of the Australian school system have been composed over decades so as to achieve neoliberal effects of marketisation, economisation and individualisation. Their assemblage thinking approach shows how drama students, resources and productions are pulled into circuits of school marketing, and aligned with the purpose of promoting schools as professional, elite and excellent. Assemblage thinking, however, does not view neoliberalism as a 'hegemonic project' but instead focuses scholars on the contingent, incoherent, partial processes of assembling neoliberalism (Higgins and Larner 2017, 5). For example, Labbert and colleagues find teachers, students and drama classrooms are involved in multiple deterritorialisations, creating 'ruptures' in the normative production of, for example, the successful student (white, heterosexual, academic), and proliferating creativity and herterogeneity. Meanwhile, other elements of the school assemblage work together to reterritorialise drama as 'low status', compelling teachers to demonstrate, through their clothes, curriculum and pedagogy, that it is a 'serious subject', feeding back into the neoliberal performativity loop.

The concepts of assemblage, territorialisation and deterritorialisation can also apply to the shifting formation and reformation of government COVID-19 policies. In this issue, Georgia Bowers offers a short reflective practitioner account of working in a residential care home in the UK during 2020. She does not engage with assemblage thinking directly, but she does show how COVID-19 policies involved the drive to draw together and fix/arrange different people, organisations, technologies and practices to ensure safety and protection. She provides a grounded perspective on the ways this policy assemblage placed huge constraints on applied theatre in settings like residential care homes but also inadvertently created conditions for new practices to emerge as practices for personal safety created conditions for creative risk-taking. Her piece comments on how closely applied theatre work can be tied to specific policies, creating shifting patterns of security and insecurity for professionals in the field.

Conceptions of policy as discourse and policy as assemblage enable a nuanced understanding of the ways in which applied theatre practice interrelates with multiple forms of policy. These theories draw attention to the ways in which power operates in the policy-practice relationship. They make evident the subtle ways drama and theatre practices can intentionally and unintentionally mobilise policy agendas and extend the reach of policy into the lives of participants. These theories also enable examination of the ways drama and theatre resist or counter policy discourses or assemblages that constrain, fix (territorialise) and problematise. But, there are multiple other ways in which applied theatre and drama education act on policy. Our final lens, then, focuses on the distinct ways embodied drama/theatre/performance practice can contest socially and ecologically unjust policies.

Policy, participation and performative cultural politics

Nancy Fraser's theory of justice is influential in the field of applied theatre, often cited as core ways of understanding how theatre, drama and performance contribute to a justice agenda (see Neelands 2007; Freebody and Finneran 2021; Barolsky 2021). Central to Fraser's consideration of justice is the principle of parity of participation (Hrubec 2004) that for society to be just, then all members of society should be able to participate in it. A simple idea with a complex heart. According to Fraser (2007), and those that use her work, for this to take place, members of society need three things: the resources to participate equally and actively in society (distribution of wealth and resources, access to services); equal social status with others in society (recognition and respect of identity groups); and access to political decision making (representation). The participatory nature of applied theatre and performance and drama education presents synergies with Fraser's ideas. While we may not be dismantling systemic oppression or building infrastructure, in the micro-environments of our theatre, community hall, classroom, or programme, we can work towards building a community that engages in justice through drama and performance-making. Many would argue that although these 'just' communities may be temporary, they are still powerful. They allow participants and facilitators alike to actively contribute to building justice-informed institutions and structures rather than have oppressive systems acting on them. Drama educators have long made the claim that the drama classroom is a space for building alternatives to neoliberal, individualised and oppressive schooling systems (e.g. O'Neill and Lambert 1982). Similarly, prison theatre practitioners advocate for the importance of their work to create spaces of

creativity and connection within an institution that actively suppresses both (e.g. Lucas 2021). Across institutional and social settings, scholars and practitioners demonstrate the power of theatre and performance as ways to get young people's voices heard in policy contexts where they are typically excluded or overlooked (O'Connor and O'Connor 2018). These are all examples of how youth arts can contribute to Nancy Fraser's (2004) 'parity of participation' by re-imagining, subverting, questioning and sometimes transforming unfair, unequitable social and institutional arrangements (including funding and policy).

In this issue, two articles focus on the distinct contribution drama and theatre-based processes can make to democratic participation. Catherine Heinemeyer, Paul Birch and Nick Rowe give a critical account of Out of Character Theatre Company's *Fresh Visions* project, asking whether it constituted a theatre-led deliberative democracy exercise. The project involved company members who were experienced actors and also experienced in the mental health system and aimed to engage a wide audience in shaping future mental health services. The authors provide evocative accounts of the project's phases of consultation, workshopping devising, performance and audience feedback. This article shows how theatre can involve inclusive, multi-vocal, deliberative processes but also makes important insights about how theatre can contribute to, but is distinctly different from democracy. Jackie Kauli and Verena Thomas, meanwhile, apply Nancy Fraser's concept of parity of participation to an applied theatre in development contexts. The project they discuss focuses on gender-based violence in Papua New Guinea. Their research provides on-the-ground examples of how theatre can intervene in the complex layers of international funding, national policy and local implementation to make space for different worldviews and knowledges.

In the above-mentioned articles, applied theatre contributes to parity of participation by creating participatory and bottom-up processes of learning and awareness-raising. Many applied programmes include an intention to build awareness, using drama to teach participants about the particulars of a policy in a top-down fashion (children learning about road safety), make participants aware of their legal rights, or provide information about social norms, such as programmes that assist newly arrived migrants to successfully navigate their new society (including language programmes). But, awareness-building can also be grass-roots, or 'bottom-up', whereby participants aim to build awareness about who they are and how they live, and teach a wider audience about themselves, or to have their experiences and ideas 'counted' in formal or informal ways. Drama and theatre programmes that ask audiences, including policy-makers, to bear witness can be considered influential in their intention to impact or change policy directives.

The potential of drama, theatre and performance in policy-making lies, in part, in their potential to activate a democratic or critical imagination (Giardina and Denzin 2011). Michael D. Giardina and Norman Denzin propose 'this imagination dialogically inserts itself into the world, provoking conflict, curiosity, criticism, and reflection, and contributes to a public conversation' (322). Applied theatre and drama education as performative forms of praxis, drawing attention to unjust policies and imagining and creating alternatives. Practice approaches like Boal's legislative theatre go beyond awareness-raising and informing policy by using the participatory aesthetics of applied theatre to both imagine and co-construct new policies.

Drama, theatre and performance can also contribute to parity of participation by bringing knowledge and meanings that emerge from embodied practices to the highly textualised domain of policy. Dwight Conquergood's seminal 1998 article describes such acts as embodied, performative cultural politics. Conquergood (1998, 26) was writing against what he saw as a Western 'textual paradigm [that] privileges distance, detachment and disclosure as ways of knowing'. He emphasises instead the importance of embodied, affective 'feeling-understanding-knowing' in counter-cultural performance practices, and the ways such practices create subversive counter-public spheres. He was particularly concerned with the ways meaning is created and experienced sensuously through the body in the act of performance. Conquergood (1998, 32) proposes an understanding of performance as kinesis, a dynamic, disruptive and 're-creative' process which could, we contend, be an important way for applied theatre and performance to engage with policy.

One example of such performative policy kinesis is the work of the young performers in South Side Rise, a performance and leadership project created by a Pan-Polynesian theatre company in Aotearoa New Zealand, the Black Friars. In their discussion of this work, Mullen et al. (2020) acknowledge how multiple policy discourses seek to govern Pasifika youth in Aotearoa, representing them as 'vulnerable, struggling, at risk … and in need of targeted corrective interventions'. But, they argue, by taking the 'stuff' of policy as the material of their performance works, the young people of Southside Rise engage in a praxis of 'breaking-down' the categories, 'hierarchies, and taxonomies' they are subject to, 're-making' them as creative fuel or ammunition, and igniting them in performance (Conquergood 1998, 32)' (Mullen et al. 2020). In doing so, the act of performance set new Polynesian or Pasifika-centred policy possibilities into motion.

In this issue, Ben Dunn focuses on the distinct potential of embodied practices within the 'performative relationship between policy and place'. Dunn identifies how the embodied spatial politics of performance might both emerge from and interrupt the top-down implementation of agglomerative policies and boundary-making. Focused on an example of applied performance that took place as part of an arts residency in a newly built private housing estate in Manchester, UK, he uses the lens of embodied space to highlight the ways experimental and playful performance practice can interrogate and work against the policy logics asserted on built environments and socio-spatial relations in the city.

Rethinking the policy-funding-practice relationship

It seems relatively unproblematic that funding and policy are connected, and they are often discussed interchangeably. This is not a new idea, 25 years ago, van den Bosch (1997, 305) argued that when public debate and analyses of policies are lacking, then the funding becomes 'the determinant of policy rather than the instrument to achieve policy goals'. However, since this argument, debate and analysis of policy in arts fields has maintained a focus on funding as core to the policy-practice nexus, rather than more sociological/philosophical considerations of policy or policy-making. We wish to unpack the idea more thoroughly to make explicit the connections between policy, funding and practice, how they function, and why they matter.

There are three key ideas that inform our understanding of the relationship between policy and funding. Firstly, and as we've already outlined, policy creates, reconfigures and maintains power relations. Policy can be enacted via the allocation, distribution

and management/monitoring of funding, playing a pivotal role in flows of power and control. Admittedly, funding is not the only way policies are enacted, the ways policies are created and communication of policies, particularly as they are reported to the 'public' are also key in how policies build, promote and maintain power structures. Funding is, however, an important way the work of policy is allocated to particular organisations or individuals *for action*. In a number of articles, tensions arise because the project discussed is funded via, enabled by, or at least brought into a relationship of association with, policies it also calls into question. Further, as we have argued previously (Mullen 2019), different modes of resourcing involve different possibilities for freedom and exploitation. For example, alcohol, tobacco, gambling and fossil fuel companies have developed sophisticated, covert ways to use grant funding to extend the work of their policies into communities. In such instances, it can be difficult for a theatre group to work out the origins of a grant, let alone to evaluate the implications of accepting it. Where there are few other options for funding private companies have a large scope to exploit the grant-dependency of small community and theatre groups. In other instances, there may be more options for state and private funding and fewer 'strings attached', allowing for more flexible, emergent and critical approaches. Funders might also conceivably work collaboratively with theatre-makers to try and reconfigure power relationships by, for example, using performance as a way to develop and implement a participatory grant-making model (transferring control for grant budgets to communities).

Secondly, and building on this idea, the actions, projects, and ideas that are funded by governments and non-government organisations can become policy by proxy. If we take the idea proposed by Bacchi (2009) and explored above, that applied theatre programmes (or any other funded programme) create 'policy proposals' about the 'problem' the programme is solving, why it needs to be solved, who they are solving it for, and who participates in the 'problem' and 'solution', then one could argue that through the process of pitching for funding, undertaking funded programmes, and evaluating the programme, policy can be understood as actionable. What work is funded (and what is not) can therefore be seen as the public communication of the policy and why it is important. Our argument here is twofold, firstly that the creation of these policy proposals makes sense of the connection between policy and funding, and secondly, as we have already stated above, that we need to be critical and aware of how we position our work within this relationship. Taking these first two ideas together, no matter what the policy document itself states, what actions are funded plays a large part in how policies are experienced by 'the public' or the social group that is being acted upon. Additionally, building on issues of power and control outlined above, funding can act as a gatekeeper for who gets to interpret or enact the policy. This then impacts who is represented in the policy as part of a policy 'solution', and who gets to frame the policy 'problems' (and in what ways). For example, policies regarding youth wellbeing can be enacted *on* youth by whoever are funded to run youth wellbeing programmes in the policy's 'name' or under its guidance. Funders could provide funding for organisations run by youth, thereby allowing young people opportunities to consider the 'problem' of youth wellbeing. Alternatively, funding could be provided to police, teachers, churches, and other, usually adult-run organisations each of whom may consider the problem of 'youth wellbeing' from different perspectives. Funding programmes, particularly those that explicitly recruit policies in their remit, legitimises the policy proposals and

problem representations inherent in the programme. Essentially, funding is a primary way decisions about whose voice is heard and whose interpretations of policies are legitimate are made.

The third idea that informs our understanding of the nexus between policy and practice is the influence that funding has over our practice in the field as a 'defacto-policy'. Working in and with applied theatre programmes is, for both facilitators and researchers, a gig-economy. Scholars are given research funding to explore topics and contexts that are of concern to the funder. New knowledge being created through research, therefore, is dependent on what aspects of our socio-political lives that are of concern to government and non-government organisations. Applied theatre and drama education programmes are similar; funded according to a perceived need, usually justified or informed by a policy agenda. There are now a number of studies internationally, which show how wide-scale national and global funding appear to have influenced trends in theatre/drama movements under the applied umbrella (e.g. Kershaw 1992; Ahmed 2002; Neelands 2007; Mundrawala 2007; Maunder 2013; Jackson 2013; Prentki 2015). There is certainly more room for studies of this kind, but there has been almost no scrutiny of the influence of funding research trends on applied theatre and drama education scholarship.

Despite the lack of systematic scrutiny, it is a generally accepted idea that certain kinds of research and practice become easier to do than others because they are encouraged and incentivised by funding models. In this issue, Leah Tidey, Chris Alphonse, Martina Joe, Donna Modeste, Thomas Jones, Sharon Seymour and Kirsten Sadeghi-Yekta make strong links between funding and policy, establishing an argument that considers how funding constrains and controls whose voices are heard, and who is allowed to speak about particular issues. Their discussion revolves around the description of a project that draws on theatre and performance to work towards language re-awakening (revitalisation) and considers the relationship between theatre and Indigenous methodologies. The authors question the role of capitalist and colonial procedures for accessing grants in Canada, and the way participatory theatre programmes can subvert dominant paradigms of consultation and communication. Other fields have considered similar questions. In a paper concerned with the relationship between research in the sciences and funding, Laudel (2006) wondered if science policy, and increased competitiveness for funding, was forcing researchers to change their research focus and methods with the (unintended) consequence that sees scientists adapt to different funding conditions by 'producing different knowledge' (489), including modifying the topics of their research and avoiding 'risky' research. They concluded that, at the time of writing, our understanding of how funding and policy agenda influence knowledge production in the field was 'fragmented at best' (490). Although written over a decade ago, and about a different field, there are broad points that apply to research funding as a whole and funding for applied theatre and drama education research.

Other authors in this issue also consider how policy is enacted via the allocation, distribution and management of funding and what this means for practice. They examine both the micro-operations and technologies of funding and the effects of nation-wide policy shifts on practice approaches and ideological orientation. For example, Alexander Coupe provides an astute analysis of the way Northern Irish policy has positioned the arts as enabling community reconciliation, while short-term funding has limited the sustained

approaches needed to genuinely achieve reconciliatory outcomes. Specifically, he identifies the way the funding and evaluation of short-term event-focused projects leads to a conception of change as 'a shift in attitude or identity from one fixed point to another' within the timeframe of the project. In doing so, neither policy or funding recognise or value participants' 'struggle to find space and support to build peace-related infrastructures of their own'. In her aforementioned reflective practice article, Georgina Bowers shows how unprecedented shifts in the policy environment can suddenly mean whole swaths of practice are made non viable because of how they are resourced. While Xunnan Li provides readers with a cultural policy perspective on the relationship between funding, ideology and theatre. Importantly, authors go beyond identifying the problems or tensions created by funding, offering examples of how theatre and drama can work with and within seemingly compromised relationships to generate alternative political-economic imaginaries and practices.

Conclusion

The diversity of the papers in this issue, in geography, approach, theoretical perspective, and findings, is testament to the diversity of our field. The papers also demonstrate the pervasive nature of policy and the importance of continually interrogating its relationship to our practice. Policy is all around us and sometimes, it does drive the work we do. But, it is possible to question the politics and ethics of how policy proposals position us, theatre/drama practice, and participants. We can not only problematise how funding initiatives marginalise the voices of certain groups while giving a megaphone to others, theatre and drama can contest this and contribute to changes. We can celebrate the ways participants challenge and inform policy-making processes through applied theatre and drama education.

This special edition was conceived because we felt that conversations about policy were important, but not often prioritised or foregrounded. At the outset of this introductory article, we asked how we might start a vibrant conversation about policy, applied theatre and drama Education, in the light of the concerns that have emerged to date from scholarship and practice? We suggest that understanding what policy is, the different ways it can be conceived, is foundational to such conversations. So, to fully understand the relationship between policy and applied theatre there is first a need to understand the different, interrelating forms of policy, and the ways policy extends well beyond government, into our everyday lives and those of students and communities. Our argument is that critical theories have an important role to play, generating and informing insights into the possibilities and pitfalls of applied theatre's intimate, but unsettled, relationship with policy. Such theories challenge the assumption that there is always a linear, causal relationship between policy, funding, theatre/drama practice and outcomes. Instead, they reframe this relationship as one that can be complex, contingent, layered, dynamic and multi-directional. But lively conversations about applied theatre, drama education and policy cannot happen using theory alone. As the examples in this article, as well as those throughout this issue, make clear, important knowledge about and understandings of this relationship is located in/emerges from praxis. Some of these papers have threads that can be tied together to make connections, while

others clash and question each other. The special contribution of editions such as this is to provide a space for these ideas to be canvassed and debated.

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