Reaping the Seeds: a garden of thoughts from the 6th World Congress of the International Drama and Education Congress

International Drama/Theatre and Education Association (IDEA) is the biggest and the most representative organisation in the world that combines the arts and educational experts, front-line practitioners, academics and policy makers together on drama/theatre education, with members from over 60 countries. Drama Australia President Sandra Gattenhof and Drama Australia Director of International Liaison Richard Sallis reflect of the outcomes of the 6th World Congress of Drama and Education held in Hong Kong in July.

Since 1992 when the founding congress was held in Porto, Portugal, five world congresses have been held once every three years - Brisbane, Australia in 1995, in Kenya in 1998, Bergen, Norway in 2001 and Ottawa, Canada in 2004. In 2007 it was Hong Kong's turn. IDEA aims to promote and advocate drama/theatre as part of a full human education and to provide an international forum for those working as drama/theatre educators throughout the world. IDEA's ongoing activities include publications, projects, international congresses and meetings, the dissemination of research and the international exchange of drama/theatre workers.

An old Chinese proverb says that a road of a thousand miles begins with one step. In the case of IDEA the journey of the spread of interest and practice in the field of drama and education within Asia took a giant leap. The 2007 Congress was significant in the history of IDEA and in the history of the development of drama education. Its significance lay in the fact that the Hong Kong Congress had the largest representation of drama educators from Asian countries than any other Congress and it was the first time that a large proportion of the workshops, papers and other presentation were delivered in Chinese. This rise in interest, particularly from Chinese speaking countries, in the transformative power of drama in teaching pedagogy, drama/theatre for development and drama/theatre for therapy has seen IDEA include Chinese as its forth official language.

Young IDEA
At each Congress the has been a strong performance program both of work by young people for young people as well as works created by professional companies for young audiences. Sitting alongside the Congress was the most diversified performance festival ever held in Hong Kong. There were more than 30 performances from overseas and Hong Kong, bringing the best educational theatres from all the continents of the world for the first time in Hong Kong. Performance types included children’s musical theatre, youth devised theatre, solo performance, performance created by artists with disabilities and special needs, traditional dance and mask performance and multi-media performance.
A highlight of each Congress is the commissioned work created by young people with experienced theatre artists. At this year’s Congress a work titled Crossing was created. Crossing was a multi-cultural performance presented in a triple-bill. Crossing I - Beyond the Horizon was a devised piece by 20 young teenage students in Hong Kong directed by Hardy Tsoi and three Hong Kong graduates of the Theatre Practice School. Crossing II - Young IDEA International Exchange Showcase was facilitated/directed by May Wong May Lan, co-worker of Kuo Po Kun for the last twenty years, one of the first TIE practitioners in Hong Kong having made Singapore her home. Crossing III - C-Nomads Land was a collaboratively developed work between experienced theatre artists from Theatre du Fil (France) and Natya Chetana (India) and 40 young people from other parts of the world, including Australia. The overall theme of the Crossing was the exploration the experience of emigration as human beings pursue better living environments, escape persecution or strive for the actualisation of ideals. The creation of such a work at each Congress seeks to personify the global lives, thoughts and experiences of young people. The work becomes a voice for reflection and change.

Morning Showcase
A particular highlight of the Congress was the performances from the local Hong Kong young people. Two outstanding presentations were

Having young people, young artists, perform in a professional theatre space normally only reserved for ‘real’ theatre is testimony to IDEA’s vision of the creative lives and ideas of the young artists they engage with. Young people do have things to say, have a right to be heard, have a need to be creatively supported and respond extremely well when creatively and intellectually challenged. Crossing was tangible evidence of IDEA’s preoccupation with global dialogues in safe artistic spaces.

The next IDEA Congress is scheduled for 2010 and will be held in Brazil. During the Hong Kong Congress there were tantalising glimpses of diversity of cultures within Latin America which will add a new particular flavour to the family of practice within the orbit of IDEA.

**Sandra Gattenhof and Richard Sallis**

Biographies:
**Dr Sandra Gattenhof**
Sandra is lecturer in drama and contemporary performance in QUT’s Creative Industries Faculty (Performance Studies). She is the Vice President of the International Drama/Theatre in Education Association (IDEA), President of Drama Australia and current editor of Australian Drama Education Magazine (ADEM) for Drama Australia, past president of Drama Queensland, Chair of Contact Inc., Board member of Zen Zen Zo Physical Theatre, Education Consultant for Brisbane Festival, Reference Group Member of KITE arts education program (Education Qld/QPAC) and past education contributing editor for Lowdown – Youth Performing Arts Magazine. In 2006 Drama Australia published her research monograph titled *Drivers of Change: Contemporary Australian Theatre for Young People*.

**Richard Sallis**