

Examiners' Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2010

GCE

GCE Drama and Theatre Studies (6DR01 01)

Exploration of Drama and Theatre

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6DR01 Exploration of Drama and Theatre

Introduction

Candidates are required to explore two dramatic texts from a practical perspective; these should be whole, formally published and substantial plays written for the theatre. Practical exploration is the backbone of the unit and the results of this exploration provide candidates with the knowledge and understanding necessary for them to write a set of Exploration Notes. There is a word limit of 3,000. Candidates are asked to explore the plays through a series of elements:

- Language
- Non-verbal-communication
- Vocal awareness
- Characterisation
- The social, cultural, historical and political context
- The visual, aural and spatial elements of production
- The response to a practitioner- for one or both of the texts
- Interpretation

Practical exploration of the texts is the most heavily weighted assessment area for Unit 1. This assessment is carried out by the teacher through a series of structured workshops and requires the application of the assessment criteria against the candidate's response to the practical exercises. This is not about performance; rather the marks should reflect the application and creativity shown in the workshops.

Exploration Notes must be illustrated with examples of how specific practical explorations allowed candidates to develop their knowledge and understanding of the texts. These examples should be embedded within the notes so it is clear how candidates arrived at the understanding they have gained over the course of the unit. The notes may refer to the exploration elements separately, for each play, they may be written as continuous prose or include sketches, diagrams and designs. It is not necessary to compare the two texts in any way, although candidates may do so if they wish. Assessment of these notes is carried out holistically, across both texts and notes must be balanced so that each text receives, as far as possible, equal attention.

Centres are asked to send a recording of an active practical drama session where candidates can be seen exploring one of the chosen texts. This should not be a performance, or preparation for a performance, rather it is an exemplification of the type of practical drama exploration that is carried out in the centre. Centres assess the relative success of their candidates in this workshop, providing marks and justification for the highest, middle and lowest attaining candidates in that session.

The final aspect of the unit is the candidate's response to a live production. Candidates produce a written evaluation of a live theatre production, of no more than 1,000 words, in which they address the elements of both performance and production, analysing and evaluating what they saw. This is an opportunity for candidates to put what they have learned during the unit into effect, by calling on knowledge and understanding of plays, the ideas of practitioners, dramatic devices and structures, appropriate vocabulary and critical awareness developed through evaluating their own and others' practical drama.

Centres are asked to supply a Record of Work that details how each of the texts was explored. Marks for this unit are awarded as follows:

- Exploration Notes: 20 marks
- Practical Exploration: 25 marks
- Evaluation of Live Theatre: 15 marks

There is essential guidance for centres in the ICE document. This document includes the requisite forms and instructions for Unit 1. It is required for all units as it includes information about procedures for all units and is updated annually with forms and deadlines for the relevant examination series. Centres should download it from the website as soon as it is available in Autumn.

The web address is: www.edexcel.com

There now follows some specific observations from the moderation team, based on centre responses to this specification in the 2010 series.

The Unit Elements

Centres are free to choose their texts and most are appropriate to the age of the candidates. In reality, the range of texts chosen appears to be limited, the most popular being *Metamorphosis*, *Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *A Doll's House*, *Our Country's Good*, *Miss Julie*, *Antigone*, *The Crucible*, *Blood Wedding*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *A View From The Bridge*.

Moderators reported that centres did not always choose plays with a level of challenge commensurate with the abilities of their students. Where centres chose texts that suitably stimulated the interest of their students, candidates generally showed enthusiasm and enjoyment of the work. Where texts were too complicated, candidates struggled to write in enough depth, or could not move beyond what the play's stage directions told them about how scenes or characters might be interpreted. The recommendation is that there should be at least 10 years between the two texts and the majority of centres chose texts from distinct time periods of theatrical development.

Most centres appear to have adhered to the guidelines concerning breadth and depth of chosen texts but occasionally candidates explored texts that were much too short, a centre choice that is limiting when seen against the elements of exploration and therefore does not fulfil the needs of the unit.

The Practical Exploration of Texts

This element of the work is assessed by teachers in centres. It was felt that most centres delivered a good range of practical activities in workshops and that candidates had been given opportunities to access the full range of marks available for this unit. The elements of exploration were tackled via a multitude of dramatic techniques. The most successful candidates had clearly been given the advantage of practice that engendered confidence and risk taking. The weakest elements, as reflected in the written work, were language and the social, cultural historical and political context. These elements seemed to be a challenge for candidates to explore practically and then to reflect successfully on in the exploration notes, often resulting in them writing in the abstract. Where candidates did find ways of discovering and exploring how language works in performance or how the context of a play can inform its interpretation, their notes were more successful. Interpretation also proved to be tricky for some candidates and they wrote long wish lists of how their own version of the play might be staged, without showing how any of it would work through practical examples based on their own exploration.

Moderators reported that several centres asked candidates to carry out elaborate comparisons between texts that were sometimes inappropriate or too difficult. More able candidates found that comparisons between the texts can be fruitful, however, and clearly these candidates gained a great deal from the process. The key is in the correspondence of text with candidate ability, experience, and interest.

Where practical exploration was structured with the written elements in mind, it was clear that candidates were much more able to offer reflective responses within the body of the exploration notes, based upon their own practical experiences.

Exploration Notes

Candidates' notes have begun this year to fall more commonly into the category of continuous prose, under the headings of the exploration elements. The strongest answers tended to take this format. Some candidates included extracts of texts, but some did not grasp that annotations must take an important role if this approach is to be successful. Some included extensive text extracts, by the side of which candidates wrote ideas for interpretation or characterisation, or what they would be doing when they said the lines, failing to make the link between the text and the annotation or to draw any substantial conclusions. Exploration Notes awarded marks in the higher levels must make a connection to the act of practical exploration. Fewer candidates provided large designs and drawings than in the first year of this series and centres have generally taken on board that the notes are the final point of a process of honing ideas and understanding, and are not a working logbook.

The range of theatre practitioners, whose ideas informed explorations, was relatively small. Most candidates used the theories of Stanislavski and Brecht, with Artaud, Berkoff and *Kneehigh* also being popular choices. Centres had clearly chosen texts and combinations of texts with practitioners in mind and, while there is no requirement for both texts to be explored in the light of the work of a practitioner, the vast majority of centres did, in fact do this. This often allowed some interesting comparisons to take place.

Overall, candidates' notes fulfilled the needs of the unit and many produced work that was highly informative, giving a real sense of what they had genuinely come to understand about their texts, through fully applied practical drama exploration. Weaker responses were overly descriptive of practical activities, did not relate to practical activities, or were the result of research carried out in libraries or on the internet.

Where centres lacked appreciation of the requirements of the Exploration Notes this led to them being much too long. However, the majority of responses kept more closely to the word limit this year. Centres are reminded that work that exceeds the word limit in the final version of the Exploration Notes should not receive any marks and it is the responsibility of the teacher assessor to reflect this, if appropriate, in the marks awarded and indicate it to the moderator. Candidates need to be fully aware of the word limit for this and other units within the specification. There are no exceptions to this.

Language

This element is used to demonstrate how the language of a play might be practically explored in workshop activities. However, moderators reported that many candidates wrote about the nature and style of the language of the playwright, with limited reference made to how they had come to this understanding through practical activity. The most successful examples of this element showed how a candidate had explored a section or comparative sections of the play using several approaches, coming to conclusions that were clearly rooted in their practical exploration.

Non-verbal Communication

More successful candidates wrote effectively about their practical work on how actors and directors make more of a text than just speaking it and how meaning is developed through a range of strategies, reflecting their understanding of bringing a text to life. Other candidates appeared to limit their work to writing about how they might physically express themselves whilst delivering lines.

Characterisation

Moderators reported that, overall, candidates showed good understanding of how characters can be explored to develop how they might be portrayed in performance. Some candidates did not however, significantly demonstrate how they had formed their opinions about characters, but still wrote at length about them.

The Social, Historical, Cultural, and Political Context

Candidates did not appear to pursue ways to relate this element to their practical explorations. There was a limited range of examples where candidates gave a clear indication of how they had used their understanding of what they knew about the play's context to help them understand how it might be explored or interpreted.

The Visual, Aural, Spatial Elements of a Production

Some candidates made good use of sketches and designs for this section. However, others failed to annotate their work sufficiently. Centres are reminded that sketches and designs themselves are worth few marks; it is what is said about the sketch or diagram or, increasingly, photograph, that earns the candidate marks.

Interpretation

The most successful responses to this element were those that showed how ideas had developed in the studio through experimentation, what had worked, and what had not. Weaker responses wrote lengthy wish lists for whole productions, many of which had little to do with the candidate's experience geared towards making theatre. Many effective responses concerned the adaptation of the methods of recognised theatre practitioners, such as *Frantic*.

The Response to a Practitioner

Candidates wrote about, and experimented with, practitioner ideas whilst exploring one of their texts. However, a minority still limited their responses to the ideas themselves, without referring to how they had used them during their drama explorations. Frequently these candidates appeared to have tackled this section through a quite separate workshop, unrelated to text exploration. As already mentioned, some centres looked at a practitioner for each text. Whilst this is not a requirement, it was interesting to note where candidates had been able to make some valid comparisons between methodologies.

The Evaluation of Live Theatre

Live productions seen also followed a similar pattern to play choices, in being specific to those shown by the professional theatre throughout the year. The vast majority of candidates wrote about performances of plays, rather than any other form of production. The more successful responses showed a good mix of analysis and evaluation and frequently provided a lively and engaging critical view of what they had seen. Weaker responses relied on description or overly subjective and unjustified evaluation. More successful candidates used the vocabulary and experience of drama they had mastered during work for the unit, to illustrate their writing. A lot of this work was well-focused and effectively presented, perhaps indicating the level of teacher input into this contained area of experience within this unit. Few centres actually wrote about a production of one of the texts studied within the unit but, where they did, there was no evidence that this element of assessment was any more or less successful than those who did not. The theatre experience, however, may have had more of an impact on the exploration notes.

Records of Work

Most centres complied with the requirement to send a single record of work for both texts. These helped moderators determine the level of work delivered to candidates. It is not necessary for centres to send highly detailed accounts of what went on over the course of the unit; these should be general accounts of the workshops delivered on both texts. The most helpful records of work were those that were closely aligned to the assessment objectives.

Sample Practical Session

The practical activities carried out for the Sample Session ranged from the highly imaginative and directly applied to the exploration of the text in question, to extensive discussion. Moderators reported this year that most centres helpfully did not record register taking and preliminary conversations. Sessions were still sometimes over-directed by teachers or did not clearly show candidates working together on a text. Many candidates were very difficult to identify. The most effective sessions were still those where candidates were clearly identified at the start, their names frequently used throughout and the camera focused on areas where candidate work was going on apace.

Centres are requested to explore how well they can capture practical sessions in their studio space, before recording their final version, to ensure lighting and sound elements are sufficient to the task. Centres with larger groups might consider splitting the group to enable the moderator to see a recorded session with, for example 9 of the 18 candidates in the group taking part in the workshop so identification becomes much easier. There is no requirement for all of the candidates in the centre to be seen in this recorded session so centres might consider how to construct the session with the moderator/moderation in mind. It is a sample session so it is good to see a range of candidates with the top, middle and bottom evident within that range, but a studio with 18 to 20 seventeen year olds in it may not provide the most conducive environment for moderation.

Teachers' Assessments, Comments and Annotations

Centres' marking of the Evaluations of Live Theatre was felt to have been more accurate than the marking for the Exploration Notes. This was noted last year by the moderation team. There was a more realistic view taken of work here and most candidates' work was more accurately assessed against the published criteria.

The assessment of the Exploration Notes was still problematic in some areas, however, with moderators applying the standard of this unit and adjusting candidates' marks accordingly.

On occasion, centre rank orders had to be modified since centres had incorrectly rewarded work that had clearly taken effort, but was not always related to the criteria. Teachers' comments did not always reflect the marks awarded. Teacher annotations are vital to the process of moderation and, where usefully applied, can help show their thinking and assessment processes. Some centres again, where candidates' work exceeded the word limit, felt that they should highlight the work they thought the moderator should read. Some teachers flagged this for the moderator, asking them to ignore the rest of the non-highlighted material. It must be stressed that this is not allowed, since all work must be that of the candidate alone and teachers must not effectively compile the notes for the candidate by pointing the moderator in the 'right direction'.

Moderators are instructed to moderate up to 3,000 words as stated in the specification.

Moderators reported examples of good practice where teacher-assessors had drawn a line across the page of work that reached the word limit to indicate to the moderator where the centre has stopped marking.

Many centres annotated their candidates' coursework with a clear view of the purpose of the undertaking, so that the moderator's task was eased considerably. It is a requirement that work from candidates is annotated. In some centres, there was evidence of genuine department standardisation and cross moderation of work, something that is essential for the security of marks awarded to candidates.

Practical Exploration

Marks given for the Sample Session were generally too high. The assessment of the practical element of the unit overall appears to have been over estimated against the assessment criteria. Whilst there may be an imbalance in the marks awarded for each of the areas of assessment, it is expected that candidates' practical marks should bear some correlation to that given for the written elements. Attention of centres is drawn to the report from the first series of this unit in 2009.

Administration

Centres ensured their work arrived on time and in good order, for the most part. However, there were some very common mistakes made by a considerable number. Centres did not always include all of the asterisked candidates from their OPTEMS sheets. It was again common for centres to omit their highest and lowest attaining candidates, information in the ICE indicates what must be sent to the moderator and the examination board deadline for this.

Centres occasionally felt they could request that their moderator take a more relaxed attitude to moderation because there had been some mitigating event or situation for candidates. This is not an appropriate course of action since formal requests for special consideration would be more advisable, and these should be made through the examinations' officer, not through the moderator.

Centres did not always check that their Sample Session recordings were visible, could be heard, or had been copied on to regular, standard size discs, playable on any domestic player. Some did not package up materials safely and DVDs were damaged in transit. Centres that used large numbers of plastic envelopes for work and papers or cardboard folders did so unnecessarily and wasted much time for their moderator. Centres are reminded that work should be presented stapled together for each candidate and DVDs packed in protective envelopes. Centres are reminded to ensure that candidates' names are on all of the pages of the exploration notes in case they become separated.

Moderators reported a disturbing trend from some centres where the teacher assessor had authenticated the word counts of candidates' Notes and Evaluations that were very clearly over published and stated limit.

Centres are reminded once again that work over the word limit must not be assessed.

High scoring work was felt to show some of these features:

- Candidates had been well taught and given the opportunity to practically explore two substantial plays that had been well chosen
- Candidates' practical explorations were embedded in their writing about the plays, across all of the elements
- Candidates had clearly been given the advantage of practice that engendered confidence and risk taking.
- Candidates' written Exploration Notes were the end product of a process of summarising and honing ideas gleaned from practical exploration. They were not their logbooks.
- Exploration Notes were balanced across both texts
- Candidates referred to their own work, not just that of their group
- Exploration notes were concise and made full use of the available number of words but did not exceed them
- Diagrams and sketches were annotated
- Key lessons were delivered that allowed the candidates to focus on each of the elements
- Candidates found ways of discovering how language works in performance or how the context of a play can inform its interpretation
- The Sample Session was well focused and showed a range of practical workshop activities with the emphasis on the candidates working on the text, rather than the teacher
- The Evaluation Of Live Theatre made clear distinctions between the play and the production and provided evidence of considered objective analysis of the production
- Responses showed a good mix of analysis and evaluation and frequently provided a lively and engaging critical view of what they had seen
- Teacher comments were detailed and specific, allowing the moderator to see examples of how and why marks had been awarded

Middle scoring work was felt to show some of these features:

- Texts did not fully meet the needs of the candidates
- Practical activities were not sufficiently explorative
- Exploration Notes were imbalanced across the two texts
- Writing for some of the elements of exploration was not sufficiently rooted in practical work
- Evaluations of Live Theatre were descriptive, rather than evaluative and analytical
- Teacher comments were brief and did not help the moderator see why marks had been awarded

Low scoring work was felt to show some of these features:

- Texts were poorly chosen, were not clearly understood by candidates, or were too simplistic
- Practical activities were teacher dominated
- Exploration Notes exceeded the word limit and failed to meet the criteria in terms of being concise and rooted in practical exploration

- Candidates carried out elaborate comparisons between texts that were sometimes inappropriate, fruitless or too difficult
- Practical insights were not used to inform the Exploration Notes
- Candidates included extracts of texts, but did not grasp that annotations must take an important role. There were extensive text extracts, by the side of which they wrote ideas for interpretation or characterisation, or what they would be doing when they said the lines, failing to make the link between the two sides or any substantial conclusions
- Elements of the notes were reproduced from other sources and were not related to candidate work, or were missing
- Candidates wrote long wish lists of how their own version of a play might be interpreted or staged, without showing how any of it would work through practical examples
- The plays' contexts were approached too theoretically, without practical exploration
- Evaluations of Live Theatre were too descriptive and lacked analysis and evaluation, or were missing
- Centres were poorly organized, had lost coursework, had not carried out centre standardisation or did not have sufficient specialist drama staff to deliver the unit

In general, however, the majority of centres proved they had a firm understanding of the purpose of this unit and this was evident in all of the material presented for moderation. Teachers who were clearly well prepared and focused on the demands of the unit had effectively served their candidates.

Grade Boundaries

6DR01 Exploration of Drama & Theatre

	Max Mark	A	B	C	D	E	N	U
Raw Boundary Mark	60	50	43	37	31	25	19	0
UMS Boundary Mark	80	64	56	48	40	32	24	0

Maximum Mark (Raw): the mark corresponding to the sum total of the marks shown on the mark scheme.

Boundary Mark: the minimum mark required by a candidate to qualify for a given grade.

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