

Moderators' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

June 2011

GCE Drama and Theatre Studies
(6DR03)
Exploration of Dramatic Performance

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6DR03 Exploration of Dramatic Performance

Requirements of the Unit

This unit requires the creation of a unique and original piece of theatre. The knowledge and understanding gained in the AS units can now be applied to a created production. Candidates are assessed on both the process of creation and the finished product in the form of a presentation to an invited audience.

The unit focuses on a group production in response to either stimulus material, themes, ideas and issues OR in response to a published play.

This unit is internally assessed and externally moderated. Assessment evidence consists of student profiles written by the teacher assessor, a final performance recorded on camera and transferred to a suitable audio/visual format and Supporting Written Evidence documents. Candidates are assessed as individuals in relation to the process and the final production. Candidates may offer Performance, Design or Directing.

The minimum group size is 3 performers and the maximum size is 6 performers. Each group may be supported by up to 3 Design candidates as long as each candidate offers a different skill. The performance should last between 15 minutes and 30 minutes maximum according to the group size.

The Supporting Written Evidence Document (SWED) should address the 6 questions printed on page 42 of the specification and must not exceed the recommended maximum word limit of 3,500 words.

There is no time limit given for the completion of this unit as long as it is completed and marked by the deadline to submit the work to the moderator which is mid-May in the year of examination.

How candidates performed on this Unit in the 2011 series

The starting point for this unit is the introduction of the stimulus material/s. There was much evidence that centres had gone to great lengths to carefully choose and prepare stimulus materials. Many centres started this work at the end of the Summer term preceding the A2 year by looking at practitioners, seeing more unusual theatrical events and encouraging their students to think beyond mainstream theatre and traditional texts. Some centres did a mock Unit 3 piece by performing to a chosen audience while others did a collaborative project within their own centre.

The main advantage of actually starting the Unit once AS results are published is that the exact number of students in the group/s is known. Placing candidates into groups is often one of the first things a centre does. It was disappointing that a few centres were still requesting groups of 7 performers. This cannot be allowed under any circumstances. A group of 7 need to work as a 4 and a 3 and the vast majority of centres adhered to this and saw that it was both fair and logical. There were a number of centres who started the unit with 3 candidates but due to unforeseen circumstances one dropped out; they were allowed to continue the course with 2 genuine candidates and then use ONE more bona fide student to make the group up to 3 thus ensuring parity between all centres. A very small number of centres insist on trying to bend the rules with the group size issue, i.e. by adding 2 non-speaking roles or by entering a group of 7 and a group of 4, stating that the 4 were unable to accommodate an extra candidate. These types of incidents really go against the spirit of the exam and put the awarding body in a very difficult position.

The marking from centres seemed much more accurate this year with the full mark range used effectively and accurately. There were a very small number of centres who under-marked their own candidates work and in these cases, moderators took great pleasure in raising the marks accordingly. Centres with smaller numbers must be wary of becoming too subjective and not applying the assessment criteria accurately. Words or phrases such as "a lovely girl", "super in

all aspects", "highly talented" and "as the only boy in the group" do not address the assessment criteria and should not be used as a means of awarding marks.

In the main, most centres chose to devise a piece of theatre from an open-ended stimulus although there was a slight increase in centres using a text as a stimulus and this certainly seemed to provide a solid structure and/or narrative arc for the final piece. The means of introducing the chosen stimulus materials appeared to vary greatly across centres. Without actually being there, it is impossible to say if there was a correlation between the introductory lessons and the final performance. It was felt, however, that those candidates who had been taught and lead through a series of workshops at the start of the unit appeared to have been given many more opportunities than those who were left to their own devices.

Evidence in SWEDs indicated that some centres presented a group of objects on a table to their candidates on day one of the new term and thereafter they were left to develop the piece themselves. At the other extreme, teachers seemed to make the entire journey with the candidates including directing the piece, which is not in the spirit – nor the rubric - of the exam. Candidates should certainly be supported as they embark upon the process of devising a unique and original piece of theatre, whatever the starting point, but ultimately the journey is their own and the teacher is there to support and guide, not to direct.

Moderators reported that in most centres work started on the unit with a series of teacher-led lessons, which became workshops that eventually handed control and decision making over to the candidates themselves and this approach appeared to have been the most successful.

While there did not seem to be anything obviously new in terms of the stimulus materials they were much better developed and demanding. Poems, artifacts and music featured heavily alongside stories, newspaper articles, films and TV documentaries. Post-traumatic stress disorder, psychological issues, Ann Frank, and a range of novels provided great starting points as well as the Chilean Miners disaster which was headline news in September & October 2010 thus influencing many people.

It appears that many centres compiled a resource bank that gave students access to a range of materials in and around a theme. War, food and loss were recurring themes but they were often developed with great maturity and sensitivity. A large number of centres indicated that teacher involvement with the stimulus materials had taken about a month before groups embarked on their own development. Some centres chose the groupings, others let the students choose but it is essential that the teacher/s ensure that the groups adhere to the size and time limits outlined in the specification and the ICE document.

A smaller number of centres chose to use a play script as the stimulus for Unit 3 than those opting to use an open-ended stimulus, however, text seemed slightly more popular than last year. Moderators reported a wide range of playwrights, new and old, that were all used very successfully.

There were also interesting combinations of materials that included play scripts alongside relevant source materials e.g. a combination of 'Billy Liar' and 'The Importance of Being Earnest' which commented on manners.

'Journey's End' alongside source materials on the execution of teenage soldiers for 'cowardice' in the 1914-18 war.

The final aspect that centres addressed when introducing stimulus materials was greater focus on genres and presentation styles. When candidates reported that their piece was in numerous styles, influenced by, for example Stanislavski, Brecht and Berkoff, it was inevitably less successful than the work of centres where candidates seemed to understand that depth was preferable to breadth and had chosen to focus on perhaps just one practitioner but it was evident that they had really understood the work of that person.

Overall, the evidence indicates that centres that took time to prepare and introduce a range of stimulus materials that met the needs of their students gave them an excellent start to this unit. Some of the weaker pieces deliberately set out to shock their audience, e.g. citing Artaud as their main influence then littering their piece with violent images and obscene language that was often gratuitous.

SWEDS

The SWED is worth 50% of the unit overall and needs to address two distinct areas (1) Research and Exploration and (2) Evaluation. The former objective was far better covered than the latter, and moderators reported that many centres had over rewarded candidates for their Evaluation, which was often very limited. There should be an even balance between these two elements as they are each worth 25% of the unit overall. The SWED 'should not exceed 3500 words' as printed in the ICE, the revised specification and the profile sheets. A small number of centres were acknowledging the word count, it is impossible not to as teachers and candidates sign to say that they have adhered to it, then flagrantly ignoring it. It is very hard to believe that in the second year of an examination, teachers are not reading the rubric before teaching the course and totally unfair to the vast majority who do so.

Many candidates stated that their SWED began as a rough working notebook and this seems a good approach as it implies that note taking has been implicit throughout the unit. There is no one specified approach to the SWED other than the word limit and the fact that it needs to address the 6 set questions. The majority of candidates addressed each of the 6 questions in turn, usually in continuous prose and often including sketches and diagrams. Moderators reported that very few candidates wrote less than 2,000 words and through lack of detailed development, they tended to be awarded marks in the lower bands for this element. Most candidates used the word count to the full and very disappointingly, a significant minority as mentioned above, had been allowed to exceed the 3500 word count. An exact word count provides rigour and challenge to the most able in the same way as a time limit does for a written examination. Happily, most centres welcomed the word limit particularly as the work is marked by the teacher-assessor in the first instance and the whole unit felt manageable and appropriate in terms of the written content.

There were still some centres who had not secured all the candidate signatures and this meant forms had to be returned for signatures as this is a requirement for all coursework components across all subjects and awarding bodies. Similarly, some centres had not entered the exact word count when this is also part of the same requirement. The onus for completing signatures and word count information actually falls on the student but of course it is the teacher who needs to organise this. Moderators felt that much time was wasted in chasing small but vital details such as this. Examination Officers were unfailingly prompt and helpful when trying to resolve these issues.

In order to fully support the candidates and the moderation process, teacher-assessors need to mark and annotate the written work, as they would do normally. Again this year, there were a significant number of centres who submitted course work for examination purposes that had no marks or annotation on it at all. Moderators reported that candidates were best supported when their SWEDs showed clear comments and annotations from the teacher/s that allowed the moderator to see where marks had been awarded and why. In the main, the candidate record card was stapled to the front of each SWED as requested in the ICE but when the moderator removed these, it was alarming to see that some candidates' written work was not named. It is essential that when work is submitted for an examination it is possible to identify exactly who has written each page. Given that nearly all the SWEDs are word processed, candidates who used a header and footer facility had the relevant information on each page by default.

Happily, there were no detected instances of plagiarism on this unit at all. This is partly due to the revised questions that seem accessible to everyone and encourage responses that are more personal. Candidates could not copy from an external source as the work is a record of their personal journey and plagiarism from one's peers is much more unusual in this and any subject area.

In terms of presentation, most SWEDs were presented on paper as requested in the ICE, although some centres clearly had not read that plastic wallets are not permitted, nor are notebooks of any kind. Some centres organised the SWEDs into performance groups, which was very helpful to the moderation process and several centres helped enormously by organising SWED's with coloured paper to identify performance groups.

Overall, centres who followed the guidelines in the ICE submitted smaller, lighter packages for moderation that were more efficient to handle and certainly more environmentally friendly.

Question 1

How is the initial material being researched and developed at significant stages during the process of creating drama?

Most candidates began this question by outlining the stimulus materials they were given and their initial response to it. Lower band responses were sidetracked by listing all the things they did not do, or by writing a substantial amount before stating that they then abandoned this idea. Dated diary entries were an effective way of showing how materials had progressed and also allowed for reflective and evaluative comments. Almost all candidates acknowledged use of the internet but it was pleasing to see that libraries, museums, verbatim accounts, archives, and many other sources and resources had been well used. Higher scoring responses continued to develop this question almost through to the performance date illustrating that the process was a lengthy and ongoing one.

Question 2

How effectively are you personally exploring and developing your role(s)?

This question produced a wide range of responses. Some did not really get beyond GCSE level when they not only talked about hot-seating they then went on to define what hot-seating is. This really is a waste of words given that they are writing for an informed reader. It is possible to interpret this question to mean just your role i.e. that of candidate writing the SWED, or the roles of the group. While either is acceptable, higher band work does require candidates to be aware of self and others and when others in the group were included in this question, it did give a sense of group ownership and responsibility.

Question 3

How did you and your group explore the possibilities of form, structure and performance style?

A considerable number of candidates gave a very broad based response to this question with weaker candidates giving an account of what the group had done, which does not address the question properly. While it is preferable for candidates to focus on what they did do, rather than what they did not do, exploration can allow for some pertinent evaluative comments and observations. A good number of responses broke the question down into the three sections of form, structure and style and this really allowed them to address and answer the question. Quite a number of centres had chosen to link this question to Question 4 and it was an effective way of connecting style with practitioners and live theatre seen.

Question 4

How did the work of established and recognised theatre practitioners, and/or the work of live theatre, influence the way in which your devised response developed?

While all the practitioners we might expect featured in this section, in order of frequency it was probably Brecht, Stanislavski, Berkoff, Artaud, Frantic Assembly, Kneehigh, Complicite, DV8, Meyerhold and Brook that were most cited. While lower band candidates seemed to present a mish-mash or list of practitioners including a bit about them, there were many cases where candidates had genuinely understood and engaged with a genre or style and managed to embrace it very successfully. Candidates spoke passionately about productions they had seen and it was wonderful to see how they had used ideas and styles. Kneehigh were much emulated and seemed to be loved by all those lucky enough to see their work. While all the mainstream theatres and companies were often referred to, candidates were also getting to see student productions, alternative and fringe theatre events, which often connect closely to them in terms of age and style.

Question 5

How successfully did your final performance communicate your aims and intentions for the piece to your audience?

Some centres thought that these last two questions were the only place to evaluate the work they produced, however high scoring candidates talked about aims and intentions from the very start of the project and used them to hold a focus throughout the SWED. It is essential that the final performance does have an audience and yet it appears that some did not.

Preparing the performance for an audience is a requirement of this unit.

Audience questionnaires and talkback sessions sometimes helped with this question though as one student wryly said, 'if your own family don't think it's great, they're not worth asking!'. It was often possible to gauge audience response from the DVD sent but this question is more concerned with the candidate's perception of what they were trying to communicate, who it was aimed at and why.

Question 6

How effectively did the social, cultural, historical/political content of the piece communicate to your audience?

This question was often the deciding factor between an excellent candidate and an outstanding one. It is a common strand that permeates the specification as a whole and some students did recognise this from their Unit 1 and 2 work. As the sixth question and in some ways the least obvious, weaker candidates often wrote very little or gave a list of dates that had no connection with the piece of theatre they had created. Stronger candidates understood that whatever stimulus they had started with, it had something to say to their audience because it referenced some social, cultural, historical or political point of view that they had understood and tried to capture or recreate.

Development and Structure

This is worth 25% of the unit and is what drama teachers recognise as the process mark. It is very important that the teacher-assessor writes comments on this section of the candidate record card that provides concrete evidence of what the candidate did and that support the mark awarded. Consequently, it was not sufficient when a small number of teacher-assessors wrote a short sentence such as 'super lad, fully involved throughout the process', or gave top band marks that did not relate to the assessment criteria. Moderators were able to cross-reference well-written teacher comments with the SWED and what the candidates themselves said about the creative process.

Performance

The performance alone is worth 25% of the unit. Moderators all reported seeing some delightful work that was innovative, engaging and entertaining. By and large, there was an obvious sense of pride in the work on the part of both students and teachers and moderators described 'intense, sensitive, thoughtful and challenging work' with 'experimentation and innovation' amongst other things.

Unfortunately, this element was still slightly over-marked with many candidates being placed in the outstanding band when really their work was excellent or even 'good'. Most groups adhered to the logical time limit, which is about 5 minutes per candidate i.e. 15 minutes for a group of 3 and up to a maximum of 30 minutes for a group of 6. Candidates did themselves no favours by exceeding the time limits as moderators only watched a maximum of 30 minutes. The DVD evidence is essential and overall was much improved this year with centres understanding that without it, the moderator had no marks to agree and the centre would be advised to submit a missing coursework form. Where centres had not submitted a DVD it was made very clear to them that marks would have to be deducted for the performance element and that they would need to follow the official channels to report missing evidence to edexcel via their examinations Officer.

This year saw more Designers and Directors than in the first series. This was very encouraging and there was some splendid work or some very weak work. Candidates with a passion and flair for their chosen field were able to produce work that was creative, innovative and energetic and some performance groups were really well supported. At the other extreme, it was felt that occasionally a very weak student, often through poor attendance, became the designer by default and had little or no influence on the final piece. Some candidates even reported in a naive way that the said designer was more of a hindrance than a help. Attendance is worthy of note as it clearly has a huge impact on devised work where every member of the group is essential to the success of the piece. Teacher examiners and fellow students all commented on attendance when they felt it had held the group back with several groups expelling poor attenders as their final performance date approached.

The increase in designers did lead to another problem this year which was the lack of a filmed presentation. Unfortunately, this is not clear in the specification but there is guidance in the ICE and the FAQ. Designers and Directors have to support their practical work with a filmed presentation to camera (maximum 10 minutes) in the same way they would for Unit 2. Where centres were unable to produce a filmed presentation they were asked to submit Form 15, the missing coursework form. However some centres were able to produce filmed evidence and were grateful for the opportunity to do so.

There were still issues with compatibility, sound quality and light levels but centres were all very keen to submit back up copies when requested. Candidates' identification to camera were also much improved with centres understanding that an unnamed candidate on a film/DVD is the same as not putting your name on an exam script. Although not ideal, where centres had omitted to do the line-up or identity parade, they often did it retrospectively or included photographs, and moderators were grateful for this attempt to rectify the situation. A number of centres provided group photographs, in costume, as a matter of course and these were helpful to the moderation process.

Cameras still need to be placed centre stage and in front of the audience but certainly recordings are getting better. This year saw a wave of promenade performances that are never easy to film but did produce some stunning work. There were several notable site-specific pieces which provided a stimulating background and often a pleasant surprise for passers-by. There is a noticeable increase in the number of performances incorporating multi media presentations e.g. power-points within the performance itself or pre-recorded footage that shows an earlier event. While this may work live in front of an audience it can create problems when the camera is filming something already on the screen.

Overall, moderators reported seeing some wonderful pieces of devised work incorporating a variety of techniques; of these, the most successful incorporated choral work and physical theatre taking influences from companies such as Frantic Assembly, DV8 and Complicite. The best work was a result of candidates who had researched and explored the stimulus material beyond the obvious. Unfortunately, there were still a number of centres producing work that did not really go beyond GCSE level.

Evidence of stronger work from centres was highly creative and clearly showed a genuine understanding of the course and how drama can be developed into something highly creative and original.

Unit 3 appears to have become an important calendar event in many centres. Candidates and teachers are often celebrating this unit with creative and innovative ideas, and there are many reports of high standards being reached and a real sense of audience appreciation.

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