

Moderators' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2012

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 unique and original production created by the candidates. Candidates are assessed on both the process of devising and the finished product in the form of a presentation or performance 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 for moderation, which is mid-May in the year of examination.

How candidates performed on this Unit in the 2012 series

Stimulus Materials

The starting point for this unit is the introduction of the stimulus material/s. There were an exciting range of stimulus materials used as starting points this year with perhaps more emphasis on text based stimuli. Some 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. Often materials were combined with, or built upon, practical workshops and research designed to enhance devising skills. Frantic Assembly had clearly inspired candidates all over the country, together with the usual practitioners such as DV8, Knee High, Complicite and some verbatim theatre. Some centres chose to use posters, adverts, titles, themes, essays, and extracts from novels, films, music and poetry as their stimulus. Fewer centres chose to work with objects. The use of music and multi-media work in performances was often very effective.

Many centres had offered workshops supporting a practitioner led approach and this seemed to result in much interesting work. This has clearly inspired and developed the candidates' initial ideas from the stimulus materials provided; Artaud, Brecht and Stanislavski remain the most common, but some Peter Brook, Meyerhold, Grotowski as well as contemporary dance influences embracing Alvin Ailey and Pina Bausch. It was clear that those groups that had worked alongside the ideas and influence of a theatre practitioner or company were able to produce quality work, often hitting the top band. This was particularly clear with reference to the amount of research they were able to do.

Stimuli included:

- London tube map, video montage of recent news footage
- The August 2011 riots
- T.S Elliot's The Wasteland
- Dr Faustus, paintings of the Seven Deadly Sins, bible references from Revelations
- The 6 wives of Henry VIII as TIE for younger students
- The Titanic – for site specific performance at an exhibition of the same theme
- "Shame" – based on the true story of a boy brought up in a chicken shed
- "Dystopias" – a package of literary stimuli
- Themes - Origins / Welsh Identity/ Mental Health
- You Tube video "Everybody's free to wear sunscreen" Baz Luhrman
- Artefacts e.g. A range of clocks
- A Stimulus Room containing atmospheric lighting, sound, objects, letters, photos, dead flowers etc.

There were still a few examples of centres leaving candidates to find their own starting point, which disadvantaged them and reflected poorly on the centre's methodology.

It was clear that a number of centres had used existing texts as a starting point: one centre had three very clever versions of "After Equus" which worked particularly well. Some candidates had really pushed the boundaries when it came to creating interesting work with examples of promenade, expressionism and fine abstract pieces.

Text based stimulus created some outstanding responses with excellent support from design students. Using text as a stimulus for unit 3 gives performance support candidates an early advantage as they have the opportunity to research existing text, themes, issues, OPC & SCH contexts. Across the teams there were very few directing candidates seen this year but there did appear to be an increase in the number of Design/Performance Support candidates.

Less challenging texts such as Too Much Punch for Judy, popular for GCSE, proved less successful. The style and form of the play made it difficult for weaker candidates to develop new approaches.

There were a few examples of TIE work this year and this was often a very effective way of working for schools with a large age range. A targeted audience proved very useful, whoever the audience tended to be.

It appears that many centres compile a resource bank that gives 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 ASG document.

More centres used a play script or text this year as the starting point for Unit 3 than in previous years. Moderators reported a wide range of playwrights, new and old, that were all used very successfully.

The final aspect that centres addressed when introducing stimulus materials was greater focus on genres and presentation styles. 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.

There appeared to be far fewer centres that more or less left the candidates to their own devices on this unit. At the other extreme, a few 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, but ultimately the journey is their own and the teacher is there to support and guide, not to direct.

The role of the Teacher-Examiner

Group Sizes

Ensuring that candidates adhere to the correct group size is the responsibility of the teacher-examiner. A very small number of centres insist on trying to break 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. There were a number of centres who started the unit with 3 candidates but due to unforeseen circumstances one dropped out; they are 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. This is clearly explained in the FAQ on the website.

Assessment

The marking from centres was usually accurate although there did appear to be some 'upward creep'. This is not uncommon with coursework units and

moderators reported that it was necessary to bring some centres back in line with the national standard. Words or phrases such as “a super girl”, “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.

Teacher examiner annotation on the SWEDs was much improved this year with teacher-examiners realising that annotation is of great benefit to the process. Where the assessor had taken the time to annotate the work, the sections highlighted were useful to moderation as they did largely point out specific examples of how candidates had met the criteria.

Marking at the lower end was often too harsh – there is still a tendency for teacher- examiners to link the effort and participation of students (evidenced in the Development mark) to the marks for the SWED. Individual SWEDs are not always reviewed objectively.

Candidates were best supported when teacher-assessors marked and annotated the written work, as they would do normally. Again this year, there were a significant number of centres that submitted course work for examination purposes that had no marks or annotation on it at all.

In the main, the candidate record card was stapled to the front of each SWED as requested in the ASG 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.

There were a minute number of detected instances of plagiarism on this unit where candidates had copied from each other rather than an external source. It is always disappointing that this serious infringement is not picked up by the centre assessor and gets as far as the moderation team.

Administration

In terms of presentation, most SWEDs were presented on paper as requested in the ASG, although too many centres are still putting work in plastic wallets, which is unnecessary. 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.

There were a surprising number of centres that 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 teacher-examiner needs to facilitate the organization of these small but vitally important administrative tasks. 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.

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

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. Moderators were able to cross-reference well-written teacher comments with the SWED and what the candidates themselves said about the creative process.

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 better covered than the latter, although there was a marked improvement in centres addressing evaluation this year. 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 ASG, the revised specification and the profile sheets. A very small number of centres had failed to record the word count, or had gone over it, but these were very much in the minority.

The centres that have produced the most highly commendable work are the centres that have offered their students a huge breadth of knowledge and resources from the history of Theatre. The range of theatre, playwrights, practice and practitioners read about during moderation is astounding. Centres are not just preparing their students for this exam but equipping them with a wide-ranging set of reference points. The centres that have been the most successful have been the centres where the students write with ease about their understanding of the devising of theatre from clear examples seen in live theatre and from their own practice in lessons and workshops.

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.

Unfortunately, there was a rise in the number of centres not using the 6 questions as sub-titles and instead submitting the SWED as a continuous prose document. This was often less successful as it didn't always address the required areas. Most candidates used the available word count to the full. 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 teacher-assessor marks the work in the first instance and the whole unit felt manageable and appropriate in terms of the written content.

Too often evaluation came at the end of the SWED reflecting on the final performance. Top band candidates were including evaluative comments throughout the entire document. There was a tendency to reflect upon or reiterate the process and original intentions but not include detail about actual outcomes in performance. A lot of centres assume that the evaluative component can only be written about in Questions 5 & 6, which minimizes the quality of evaluative writing.

Where centres acquire formal feedback from their audience, usually in the form of a pre-prepared evaluative questionnaire, candidates were able to use this as supportive and objective evidence. In the best instances this information was evaluated and reflected upon rather than regurgitated.

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. Candidates do best when they get straight to the point of what they were going to do, then go on to say how and why they developed it as they did, while analyzing its effectiveness.

Question 2

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

This question was really well done this year with candidates appreciating that once they explained their role/s they then needed to give detailed examples of what they had done to explore it. Stronger candidates explained things that they tried out in rehearsals while maintaining awareness 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. There were more direct references to the structure of texts and plays seen this year and this worked well for candidates as they were writing about something that they knew from personal experience.

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, Frantic Assembly were the most common cited by far. Brecht, Stanislavski, Berkoff, Artaud, Kneehigh, Complicite, DV8, Meyerhold and Brook were also much used with dance companies featuring more prominently than in the past. 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.

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 and it did appear to be completed in more depth and detail this year. 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.

Performance

The performance 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 that came across from the candidates themselves. Moderators described 'intense, sensitive, thoughtful and challenging work' with 'experimentation and innovation' amongst other things.

Many centres are using a pre show to their work and involving the audience from their entrance to the theatre or performance space. This can create engaging and provocative work although in doing so, many centres are forgetting the importance of candidate identification at the beginning, which slows down the moderation process.

Any pre-show also counts in the time limit for the performance and moderators will stop watching when the maximum time limit is reached.

Performance length varied with some moderators reporting a number that were too long, especially when involving small numbers of students.

There was lots of multi-media work, images, film, sound etc. at best to enhance mood, atmosphere and narrative structure, at worst merely to make the piece last longer.

There was a marked increase in the use of physical theatre – as a direct result of exposure to such companies as Frantic Assembly and Knee High. Centres should be mindful of the fact that this is a Drama and Theatre Studies specification, not Dance. A very small number of centres submitted work that had an imbalance between movement sequences and dialogue.

The quality of the performance recording is vitally important and the positioning of the camera is fundamental. Often when positioned too far away from the performance space finer details are lost. Lighting can either blur or bleach the performers so the details of the performance cannot be evidenced. Cameras placed behind the audience can obscure the view and this was the most common problem encountered.

Unfortunately, performance was regularly 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.

Centres had made a much better job this year of recording Performance Support candidates; this was usually done before the performance without an audience present.

This year saw more Designers than in the first two 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 attendees as their final performance date approached.

There were still issues with compatibility, sound quality and light levels but centres were all very keen to submit backup copies when requested. A surprising number of DVDs were not in the right format for computer or domestic player, it cannot be emphasised enough that centres need to check compatibility before sending DVDs to their moderator. Candidates' identification to camera were also much improved with centres re-recording this if it had been overlooked in the heat of the moment. 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. There was a noticeable increase in the number of performances incorporating multimedia 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. Candidates are not marked on recordings done prior to the live examination, it is important that we maintain a live theatre experience for this unit. Pre-recorded material should be used only to support the piece overall.

Moderators reported seeing some wonderful pieces of devised work incorporating a variety of techniques. The best work was a result of candidates who had researched and explored the stimulus material beyond the obvious. Unfortunately, there were a small 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 remains a challenging unit for the A2 year, but in the main a highly enjoyable one. Candidates are able to showcase the best of their practical skills while sharing all that they have learnt about the theatre. There are many reports of high standards being reached and a real sense of audience appreciation.

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