

Moderators' Report/  
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2013

GCE Drama and Theatre Studies  
(6DR03)  
Unit 3: 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. (SWEDs)

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 2013 series**

#### **Stimulus Materials**

The starting point for this unit is the introduction of the stimulus material/s. It has become increasingly apparent that the choice and exploration of the stimulus material is fundamental to the success of the unit overall. The subject matter must be engaging, challenging and appropriate. It must lend itself to research and development while having dramatic potential. The required outcome is a piece of theatre and this must be the goal that the stimulus leads to. Some centres start 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. A few centres use June and July before the final year of study to run a mock or mini Unit 3 piece, which students often refer to, citing errors they made on the mock piece. This unit is now in its fourth year and centres are getting progressively more skilled and focussed at introducing their students to a wide range of workshops, experiences and skills to support their work on Unit 3. There is a clear correlation between the amount of teacher/centre input and the quality of the final performance. It has become a given that centres will have studied

a range of practitioners and seen as much live theatre as possible. Frantic Assembly had clearly inspired candidates all over the country, together with the usual practitioners such as DV8, Knee High, Complicite and various verbatim theatre pieces.

Influences reflect touring productions during the year and companies who offer workshops. There was however a noticeable change with the work of Frantic in particular this year. Some moderators reported that they were seeing performances where there was a direct copying or emulating of a 'Frantic' movement exchange – this was always accompanied by emotive music and the routines were strikingly similar but ultimately lacked any connection or relevance to the performance itself. It seems there is a balance to be struck between being influenced by practitioners and performances and knowing how much of their work to include in your own.

A full range of practitioners are encountered with Artaud, Brecht and Stanislavski the most common, but some Peter Brook, Meyerhold, Grotowski as well as contemporary dance influences, in particular Pina Bausch are all regularly referenced. Centres that produce top band work had really embraced the aspect of RESEARCH, and given that Research and Exploration are worth a quarter of the marks for the unit, they had spent around a quarter of their time doing this very thing. Following on from this, the same centres that had devoted time to 'research' then went on to dedicate around half of the SWED to Research and Exploration, which allowed students to access the marks accordingly.

Many centres are using a combination of stimulus materials including objects, art works, music, etc.

Stimuli included -

- Books: The Handmaids Tale by Margaret Atwood, Catcher in the Rye, Alice in Wonderland, Cautionary Tales, The Incredible Vanishing (Denise Coffey), Grimm's Tales, Ghost stories, The Yellow Wallpaper.
- Playwrights: such as Helen Edmundsen, Simon Reade & Abbi Morgan.
- Plays: The Mystery Plays, Blood Wedding,
- Poems: 'The Beacon by Simon Armitage
- Films: The Changeling
- Issues: The teenage birth-rate in Southampton, Multiple Personality Disorder/ Dissociative Identity Order, Geishas, Aberfan Disaster, Murderers through history, Dream & Reality, The Suffragette movement, The troubles in N Ireland in the 70s, American Spree Killings, Lizzie Borden, London Riots, Baby P, Fostering /Adoption, Jack the Ripper, child abuse, elderly abuse, bombings, war, post traumatic stress disorder, technology,

- Other: The history of women's boxing after reading an article about the Olympic success of a local woman. The group found a rich seam of entertaining and informative material. Their staging was a boxing ring.

There were numerous pieces about Myra Hindley & Ian Brady this year, and it is usually possible to trace things like this to a recent TV documentary or news event.

There were also some delightful site specific pieces such as a studio turned into an Italian restaurant, a café setting in Pre-WW2 Paris, and some immersive styles similar to Punchdrunk in their intentions.

Performances to specific audiences tended to work well and there was a slight increase in the number of T-I-E pieces performed to a younger audience.

There seemed to be a marked increase in the number of pieces done in traverse this year. This can make for an exciting space but it is not easy to capture on camera.

Some centres chose to make the practitioner or style the driving force in itself, and while this did work in a few centres, for others it proved to be too big a task. When students wrote that their objective was to be 'Brechtian' or 'Artaudian' and 'disturb the audience', this could lead to inappropriate decisions being made that left both performer and audience in a vulnerable position.

Many students choose to deal with serious issues that often have a dark side. Unfortunately there were a small number of pieces that made moderators feel most uncomfortable when watching the performances. Centres must never lose sight of the fact that this is a public examination where we have a duty of care to our young people and to the audiences that watch their work. The issues that require extremely sensitive handling and firm guidance from the teacher always involve sex and/or violence. They arise from the horrific stories we hear about child abuse, rape, violence and the recent spate of celebrity paedophilia cases. This is an area that we will keep a very close eye on in future series and centres are reminded to monitor the work of their students very carefully throughout the devising process.

A few centres gave their students too much material or material without a focus and this produced lots of ideas that the candidates seemed to have difficulty organising into an in-depth and coherent piece. Where the stimulus was more focused and specific, candidates were able to use research to inform the character development and produce meaningful work that conveyed the sense that they had really invested creatively and emotionally in the piece.

There were still a small number of centres appearing to leave candidates to find their own starting point, which disadvantaged them and reflected poorly on the centre's methodology.

There were very few directing candidates again this year and about the same number of Design/Performance Support candidates. When they are skilful, enthusiastic design candidates, they can really add a great deal to a performance.

About the same number of centres as in previous years used a play script as the starting point for Unit 3.

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 and gave them an excellent start to this unit.

### **Development and Structure**

This is worth 25% of the unit and is what drama teachers know 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. Detailed and specific comments are the most helpful.

### **SWED (Supporting Written Evidence Document)**

The SWED is worth 50% of the unit overall and needs to address two distinct areas (1) Research and Exploration and (2) Evaluation. Centres have got much better at addressing these two distinct elements and recognize that to access top band marks for these elements the SWED should deal with both areas in equal measure. Candidates still spend more time on research and exploration than evaluation and this is the main reason that evaluation is often over-marked. 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. The vast majority of centres have really got to grips with the word count issue and there were only a tiny number of candidates who exceeded the word limit.

There was an increase in the number of candidates submitting SWEDs that were considerably under the 3,500 word limit. These tended to be the work of weaker candidates who shied away from using the word count to its full potential. Unfortunately some of the SWEDs that were significantly under the word count were significantly over marked. Teacher examiners must recognize that work that is a thousand or more words less than the word limit has much further to go if they are to access the higher band marks. 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, photos and diagrams which were usually very supportive to the work overall.

Unfortunately, there continued to be a growing number of centres not using the 6 questions as sub-titles and instead submitting the SWED as a continuous prose document. This was usually less successful and many moderators felt that SWEDs without the questions lacked focus and invariably missed the required areas.

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. Effective evaluation should be integral to the whole document.

Top band responses analysed the process and highlighted the thought process clearly using clear examples from rehearsal. Less successful SWEDs seemed to be teacher generated/ taught responses.

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.

Googling and then bullet pointing information about practitioners does not meet the requirements of the assessment criteria and this was more typical of lower scoring work.

#### *Question 2*

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

This question was well answered, as all candidates were able to talk about themselves with ease using 'I', rather than 'we'. 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. The most significant issue with the SWEDs was the lack of links made between the research and the process/piece. There were many instances where research was discussed descriptively but with just an 'add on' sentence about the impact it had on process/performance being awarded as an example of depth of research.

#### *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.

Higher band work made a meaningful and relevant connection between work they had seen or studied and their own devised piece. Weaker candidates tended to present question 4 as a list of things they had seen, studied or even just heard of, without making the connections to their own work.

#### *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. 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.

A small number of SWEDs were submitted in an inappropriate format. The work had to be returned to centres to be re-presented in an acceptable format as specified in the ASG. This not only slowed the moderation process down but presented challenges when 'creative' work failed to realise the academic rigour expected from an A2 candidate. Teachers must ensure that their candidates are aware of the requirements for preparing and submitting coursework so that the security of the exam is not compromised in any way. Similarly, candidates should be aware that additional material and appendices are not helpful to the process and if they are not part of the 3500 word limit, they will not be looked at.

Happily, many moderators commented that they saw work that was beautifully presented, detailed, knowledgeable and analytical. It was clear that thousands of candidates had taken great pride in presenting their written work for this unit.

## 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, this will include the pre-show.

Performance length varied with some moderators reporting a number that were too long, especially when involving small numbers of students. It is more appropriate that a small group of performers i.e. 3 students, perform for around 15-20 minutes.

Centres should be aware that the moderator will only watch a performance for 30 minutes as this is the maximum time allowed. The performance mark given must accurately reflect what each candidate has achieved within the 30 minute examination frame.

There was a marked increase in the use of physical theatre – as a direct result of exposure to such companies as Frantic Assembly and as noted earlier in this report, a small number of centres were including movement routines to a formula that didn't necessarily add to or connect with the rest of their performance. Similarly, 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 particularly those that cited Pina Bausch as a major influence.

There was a noticeable increase in more innovative and risky performance venues this year and while this can be creative and exciting, it does come with its own problems. Centres which use promenade as a performance style are strongly encouraged to remember the importance of the DVD as an evidence base to support the moderation process; all too often promenade work remains poorly filmed and lit and leaves the moderator struggling to find the evidence required for moderation purposes. As with any genre or style Promenade has its own demands as an example of the art form, it makes clear demands on candidates to plan for and manage a meaningful performance which meets the assessment criteria and adheres to the specification's guidance.

Unfortunately, the performance element was the most over-marked of the whole unit with too many candidates being placed in the outstanding band when really their work was excellent or even 'good'.

### **Camera Issues**

This has become such a major issue with this unit that it warrants its own section this year.

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. It is such a pity that candidates cannot always be seen on the recording, in particular their faces where so much is conveyed.

Unfortunately, lots of moderators said that they couldn't see any facial expressions. Cameras placed behind the audience can obscure the view enormously and this was the most common problem encountered. Centres are advised to film a dress rehearsal, complete with audience to see for themselves whether the camera is well placed and fit for purpose.

Many productions watched had the bottom third of the screen obscured by audience heads.

The DVD evidence is essential and without it, moderators cannot agree the marks. In these cases, 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.

There were still issues with compatibility, sound quality and light levels but centres were all very keen to submit back up 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 many recordings are getting significantly better as the technology improves. There are still a good 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. The camera does not always pick up words and images 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.

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 a slight increase in the number of Designers. 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.

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.

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.

## **The Role of the Teacher Examiner**

### **Group Sizes**

There was a major issue with group sizes this year. This is the responsibility of the teacher-examiner. It is very clear that the minimum group size is 3 performers and the maximum is 6 performers; this must be adhered to, there can be no exceptions. For centres entering a group of 7 performers there can be no exceptions at all, they should be working as a group of 3 and a group of 4. Any centres that submitted a group of 7 performers were referred to the Business Assurance team. Permission to work as a group of 7 performers will never be granted.

There were a number of centres who started the unit with 3 or less candidates or due to unforeseen circumstances, their numbers fell to less than 3. They are allowed to continue the course by making the group up to 3 (maximum) by using one or two non-examined candidates as appropriate, thus ensuring parity between all centres. Centres who need to use a non-examined candidate must seek permission from the drama assessment team; Copies of the permission letter or e-mail should then be forwarded

with the materials when the work is sent to the moderator. This is clearly explained in the FAQ on the website.

## **Assessment**

The marking from centres was usually accurate although a small number of centres had over-marked the work. Any work that was altered significantly was seen by the first line moderator and then sent to their team leader. 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.

There were more students being marked at the lower end across all four elements and this may reflect the fact that many centres are increasing their numbers post-16 and possibly recruiting a different calibre of student. Candidates were best supported when teacher-assessors marked and annotated the written work, as they would do normally. A smaller number of centres than previous series 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.

Many teachers wrote brilliantly about their students and the work they had achieved. The record cards were a pleasure to read.

## **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 SWEDs 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.

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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