

Unit 26: Approaches to Directing for Theatre

Unit code: M/502/5091

QCF Level 3: BTEC National

Credit value: 10

Guided learning hours: 60

● Aim and purpose

The aim of this unit is to enable learners to understand a range of approaches to theatre directing and to put into practice elements of different directorial styles in their own work for the theatre.

● Unit introduction

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the director has become the key figure in drama and theatre production. The director is seen as responsible for the artistic vision of the production and for the interpretation of the text. This means that directors have a huge and exciting amount of responsibility, so they must be well informed in a large number of areas. They must feel secure in being able to develop an overall vision.

Directors need to know how to work with a team to achieve that vision. They must develop the ability to organise complex activities and the personal qualities to deal with actors and members of the production team. A director should also be able to develop a directorial style, conceive a production in terms of style and then set about making it work in reality with a group of actors, designers and technicians.

The aim of this unit is to introduce aspiring young directors to the range of knowledge required to enable them to set off confidently on the complicated route to being an experienced and accomplished director. The unit covers the elements of style, historical production context, interpretation and directorial approach, by enabling learners to experience different plays and the theories of key practitioners. An important element of the unit is applying theory to practice: learners have the opportunity to apply their knowledge by taking on practical work in the rehearsal room, discovering how to realise their ideas in a real-life situation, working with actors and a performance space, and with the appropriate stage equipment and technology.

● Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit a learner should:

- 1 Understand the influence of production context in theatre
- 2 Understand approaches to the role of theatre director
- 3 Be able to direct a short performance.

Unit content

1 Understand the influence of production context in theatre

Style: production styles eg naturalism/realism, epic theatre, tragedy, comedy of manners, farce, melodrama, musical theatre, mixed media

Historical production context: a knowledge of at least two types of playing conditions eg Classical Greek/Roman theatre, medieval mystery cycles, Elizabethan/Jacobean, Restoration, late eighteenth-, nineteenth- and twentieth-century century music hall, twentieth-/twenty-first-century West End, repertory, studio and fringe, street, guerrilla theatre

2 Understand approaches to the role of theatre director

Significant practitioners: eg Stanislavski, Brecht, Artaud, Brook, Craig, Boal, Simon McBurney or any contemporary director with a distinctive working method

3 Be able to direct a short performance

Direct in a particular style: awareness of directorial style; communication with actors and the production team; off-text exercises and activities; exploration of text, movement and vocal exercises; improvisation; use of space, props, design elements

Short performance: scenes or extracts eg British, European, American or world drama, devised pieces

Assessment and grading criteria

In order to pass this unit, the evidence that the learner presents for assessment needs to demonstrate that they can meet all the learning outcomes for the unit. The assessment criteria for a pass grade describe the level of achievement required to pass this unit.

Assessment and grading criteria		
To achieve a pass grade the evidence must show that the learner is able to:	To achieve a merit grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass criteria, the learner is able to:	To achieve a distinction grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass and merit criteria, the learner is able to:
P1 discuss the style and historical production context of two plays from different eras [IE]	M1 explain the style and historical production context of two plays from different eras	D1 analyse the style and historical production context of two plays from different eras
P2 discuss the directorial approaches of two practitioners [IE]	M2 explain clearly the directorial approaches of two practitioners	D2 analyse the directorial approaches of two practitioners
P3 direct a short performance, demonstrating directorial intentions, methods and style with support and guidance. [CT, RL, TW, SM]	M3 direct a short performance, clearly demonstrating directorial intentions, methods and style with minimal support and guidance.	D3 independently direct a short performance, demonstrating directorial intentions, methods and style in a thorough and detailed manner.

PLTS: This summary references where applicable, in the square brackets, the elements of the personal, learning and thinking skills applicable in the pass criteria. It identifies opportunities for learners to demonstrate effective application of the referenced elements of the skills.

Key	IE – independent enquirers CT – creative thinkers	RL – reflective learners TW – team workers	SM – self-managers EP – effective participators
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Essential guidance for tutors

Delivery

In the early stages of this unit it will be important to develop learners' knowledge. They will need to learn the significant features of the playing conditions of different periods, relating these conditions to the features of the associated texts. For example, the text of *Romeo and Juliet*, with its fast-changing scenes and the requirement for a balcony and a bed, may be related to the playing conditions of the Elizabethan theatre. Learners should be encouraged to see and discuss the opportunities and limitations of particular stage forms. Visits, either actual or virtual, to theatres which have preserved or replicated historical playing conditions will be valuable. Learners should experiment in workshop situations with different stage forms and playing conditions, gaining experience of how the spaces, stage features and actor-audience relationships may work in practice. At all stages learners should be encouraged to watch live performances in a variety of venues. Visits to local theatres or arts centres to study and evaluate the performance spaces will also be useful.

Tutors may opt to study two significant practitioners in detail with the whole group of learners, or may encourage choice by enabling individual learners to select and research practitioners. It is worth bearing in mind that researching the work of directors is not always easy and that learners will need support to find relevant materials, which may include specific websites associated with individual directors and reviews of particular productions. The emphasis should be on the director's intentions and working methods.

Once learners can identify a range of features and directorial choices in relation to the staging of a play, they should study and work on specific texts from different eras, chosen to demonstrate contrasts in playing conditions and styles. Activities will vary with the specific texts, but all learners should have the opportunity to direct, probably working with their peers. As directors, they will need to prepare rehearsals and be clear about their intentions and their working methods. Feedback from both peers and tutors will be important in enabling learners to reflect on the process of directing and being directed and to evaluate their achievement.

This process will be further developed when learners undertake their own small-scale directing project. The choice of texts or material will need to be carefully negotiated with an eye to the available human, time, space and technical resources. Devised work may also be considered, especially if this relates to the work of a particular practitioner. It may be useful to establish small working groups in which the roles of director and actors are rotated. Tutors will need to spend time monitoring and supporting those learners operating as directors, ensuring that their intentions are clear and that rehearsal sessions are planned. Learners will need to be encouraged to incorporate rehearsal methods of the practitioners they have studied in the previous section of the unit. As directors, they will need to develop and maintain a production file which should incorporate such material as research, rehearsal plans, rehearsal notes and set groundplans. They will also need to write an evaluation of the final production. If learners have previously completed the associated unit, *The Practice of Directing for Theatre*, they will be familiar with the preparation of a script for production.

Outline learning plan

The outline learning plan has been included in this unit as guidance and can be used in conjunction with the programme of suggested assignments.

The outline learning plan demonstrates one way in planning the delivery and assessment of this unit.

Topic and suggested assignments/activities and/assessment

Introduction to unit content and organisation, including the concepts of directorial style and production context.

Practical exploration of the impact of style on theatrical production, using a range of extracts from texts and aspects of ideas from a range of practitioners. This will take in a variety of approaches from the naturalistic to different kinds of non-naturalism. The emphasis will be on applying theory in practice in the rehearsal room.

Practical exploration of elements of production context on historical texts. This will include the effect of playing conditions eg stage form and technical capability. A range of extracts (rather than full texts) will provide examples for exploration, with at least two contrasting texts examined in detail.

Assignment 1: Presentation on Historical Production Context (P1, M1, D1)

Individual or small group presentation/demonstration (recorded on video/DVD) of two contrasting examples of historical production context, using examples from at least two texts. Learners will need to undertake research and preparation individually or as a small group. The presentation/demonstration may take a variety of forms, but there should be a significant element of demonstration, showing an understanding of the effect of production context on performance.

Feedback session.

Practical exploration of contrasting elements in the approaches of established theatre practitioners to directing, focusing on at least two significant practitioners. Selected short extracts from texts (or, where appropriate, devised material) will provide material for learners to conduct their explorations in the light of theory.

Assignment 2: Presentation on Practitioners' Rehearsal Methods (P2, M2, D2)

Individual presentation/demonstration (recorded on video/DVD) of the effect of two contrasting practitioners' approaches in a rehearsal situation. Learners will need to undertake individual research and preparation. The presentation/demonstration may take a variety of forms, but there should be a significant element of demonstration, showing an understanding of the effect of the practitioners' theories on rehearsal.

Feedback session.

Assignment 3: Direction Project (P3, M3, D3)

Project: in groups, rotating the role of director, learners should direct a scene or short play to final production level. Learners should consciously incorporate elements of the approaches of one or more theatrical practitioners. Individual learners will need to spend time producing appropriate supporting documentation (a production file) for their production, including an explanation of the approach taken and an evaluation of the final product.

Assessment will take place at appropriate points, depending on the way in which the groups are organised.

Feedback and plenary.

Assessment

Directing is a practical activity which relies on theoretical approaches. Learners will need to demonstrate that they have understood the implications for directors of the staging of texts from different historical periods.

They will need to produce evidence that they understand the methods and the purposes associated with the approaches of specific well-established practitioners, but also demonstrate practically that they can incorporate these methods into practical work in the rehearsal room.

For criterion 1, learners will need to give an individual or small group presentation which demonstrates an understanding of the styles and historical production context of two different texts. Presentations should be recorded on video/DVD: Tutors may wish to see the research and other written work which has informed the presentations as further evidence of learners' achievement.

For P1, learners will show an understanding of some of the significant elements of style and of the historical production context of both chosen texts. There will be some attempt to link these elements with the effect produced on an audience, for example in commenting on how a particular stage form may have affected the actor-audience relationship, or how a stage convention may have worked effectively. Any elements of demonstration will be linked to significant points. Understanding may be patchy, however.

For M1, learners will display a sound knowledge of the relevant elements of style and of the historical production context of both chosen texts. Their account will be clear about the effects of these on an audience and they will be able to relate these to specific points from the chosen texts. They will be able to point to contrasts between the two periods. Any elements of demonstration will be well-chosen and clear.

For D1, learners will be able to demonstrate close familiarity with a range of features of the style and of the historical production context of both chosen texts. They will be able to give a detailed account of the effects of these on an audience and use detailed examples from both texts as illustrations. Any elements of demonstration will be effective in throwing additional light on relevant points.

For criterion 2, learners will demonstrate an understanding of the rehearsal methods of two significant practitioners. The methods will need to be seen in the context of the practitioners' more general theories and beliefs, so that their aim can be understood. Presentations should be recorded on video/DVD: Tutors may wish to see the research and other written work which has informed the presentations as further evidence of learners' achievement.

For P2, learners will be able to identify some of the significant rehearsal methods of both practitioners and to show an understanding of their aims. They will be able to describe how to put the rehearsal methods into practice with actors. Any demonstrations will be sufficiently relevant to demonstrate the essential point of the method. Explanations and demonstrations may not always be thorough, however, and the link between individual methods and a broader approach may be patchy.

For M2, learners will clearly identify a range of rehearsal methods of both practitioners and relate these specifically to their aims. They will be able to give a detailed account of how these methods may be put into practice with actors. They will be able to make appropriate links between the methods and the broader approaches of the practitioners. Any demonstrations will be clearly relevant and helpful in illustrating the implementation of the method.

For D2, learners will demonstrate a detailed knowledge of a wide range of rehearsal methods of both practitioners, relating them to their immediate and their wider purposes, showing how they link with the broader approaches of the practitioners. They will be able to give an informed and detailed account of how these methods may be put into practice with actors. Any demonstrations will be chosen appropriately and will clearly exemplify the implementation of the method.

For criterion 3, learners are required to incorporate selected elements of what they have previously learnt about style, historical production context and the rehearsal methods of practitioners into their own directing. The evidence will be in the form of a production file associated with the practical work undertaken. This file should contain material relevant to the process of directing the particular scene and should provide clear evidence of the chosen directorial methods and style, demonstrating in written notes and visual representations (stage plans, storyboards, etc) how the director plans to put these intentions into practice. A final self-evaluation will provide an opportunity for reflection on how successfully the objectives have been achieved. There should be a minimum of two performers in the cast, but to explore some directorial styles a larger cast may be more appropriate. This will be supplemented by tutor observation of rehearsals and of final productions. Feedback from peers involved in the process may also provide evidence.

For P3, learners will make a selection of elements of style, original production context and/or specific rehearsal methods and make a clear attempt to put these into practice in rehearsal. At least two significant elements should be incorporated. The director's file should provide evidence of the link between the selected elements and the rehearsal intentions and the evaluation will provide some reflection. Links may not be always clearly articulated and detailed and the rehearsal practice may not be entirely consistent, but there will be a clear attempt to fulfil the criterion.

For M3, learners will make a selection as for the pass criterion and put the elements into practice in rehearsal with some evident success. At least four significant elements should be incorporated. The director's file will contain a range of documents which demonstrate clearly how the selected elements will be put into practice and the evaluation will demonstrate an informed analysis of what was achieved.

For D3, learners will make a selection as for the pass and merit criteria and put the elements into practice with clear success. As with the merit criterion, at least four significant elements should be incorporated. The director's file will provide ample evidence of the thoughtful planning for the application of the selected elements. The evaluation will provide a detailed analysis of what was achieved.

Programme of suggested assignments

The table below shows a programme of suggested assignments that cover the pass, merit and distinction criteria in the assessment and grading grid. This is for guidance and it is recommended that centres either write their own assignments or adapt any Edexcel assignments to meet local needs and resources.

Criteria covered	Assignment title	Scenario	Assessment method
P1, M1, D1	Presentation on Historical Production Context	Individual or group presentation/demonstration on the contrasting production context of two (or more) texts from different historical periods.	Presentation (recorded on video/DVD).
P2, M2, D2	Presentation on Practitioners' Rehearsal Methods	Individual presentation/demonstration on the contrasting rehearsal methods of two practitioners of directing.	Presentation (recorded on video/DVD).
P3, M3, D3	Direction Project	Individual directing of short plays/scenes, consciously incorporating elements derived from specific styles or approaches. Work to fulfil this criterion will capitalise on work previously undertaken to fulfil criteria 1 and 2.	Observed rehearsal. Finished production. Supporting documentation, including evaluation and production file.

Links to National Occupational Standards, other BTEC units, other BTEC qualifications and other relevant units and qualifications

This unit forms part of the BTEC Performing and Production Arts sector suite. This unit has particular links with the following unit titles in the BTEC Performing and Production Arts suite:

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Exploring Acting Skills	Acting Skills and Techniques	Principles of Acting
		Applying Acting Styles
		Approaches to Directing Theatre

Essential resources

Learners will need access to adequate rehearsal spaces and to a reasonably well-equipped performance area in which lighting, sound and set elements are available. This will necessitate some technical support. A range of properties and basic costumes will also be necessary. Learners will also need access to a group of actors and a range of scripts from which they may choose extracts or short plays to direct. Access to video/DVD recording equipment will be important for the recording of presentations and productions – and possibly rehearsal sessions.

Employer engagement and vocational contexts

An understanding of the structure of the performing arts industry and the place of the director (usually a freelance) within it will help learners to place their work in a vocational context. There may be opportunities for learners to hear talks by professional directors, especially in relation to productions which they have the opportunity to see themselves. Opportunities to observe professional directors at work are rare, except in the context of workshops, but learners may have opportunities to observe directors at work in other contexts, for example within the centre.

Indicative reading for learners

Textbooks

Ayckbourn A – *The Crafty Art of Playmaking* (Faber, 2002) ISBN 9780571215096

Braun E – *The Director and the Stage: From Naturalism to Grotowski* (Methuen, 2003) ISBN 9780413463005

Brook P – *The Empty Space: A Book about the Theatre: Deadly, Holy, Rough, Immediate* (Touchstone, 1996)
ISBN 9780684829579

Delgado M and Heritage P (editors) – *In Contact with the Gods?: Directors Talk Theatre* (MUP, 1996)
ISBN 9780719047633

Irvin P – *Directing for the Stage* (RotoVision, 2003) ISBN 9782880466619

Mitter S and Shevtsova M (editors) – *Fifty Key Theatre Directors* (Routledge, 2005) ISBN 9780415187329

Unwin S – *So You Want to Be a Theatre Director?* (Nick Hern Books, 2004) ISBN 9781854597793

Websites

www.bbc.co.uk British Broadcasting Corporation

www.playsonthenet.com/potn Plays on the net

www.theatrenet.co.uk Theatre Net

Delivery of personal, learning and thinking skills

The table below identifies the opportunities for personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS) that have been included within the pass assessment criteria of this unit.

Skill	When learners are ...
Independent enquirers	researching the historical production context of specific texts researching the rehearsal methods of practitioners of directing
Creative thinkers	directing a cast in rehearsal, both in planning activities and in responding to developments in the rehearsal room
Reflective learners	evaluating own experience as a director, reflecting on the use of particular methods and approaches
Team workers	working with a production team (actors, designers, technicians) to agreed ends
Self-managers	organising rehearsal plans and resources, planning use of rehearsal time.

Although PLTS are identified within this unit as an inherent part of the assessment criteria, there are further opportunities to develop a range of PLTS through various approaches to teaching and learning.

Skill	When learners are ...
Independent enquirers	engaging in research related to productions, production history and theatrical equipment/sets
Creative thinkers	engaging in discussing and solving potential production problems, posed by hypothetical or actual situations
Reflective learners	considering their own practice and achievement when directing, or reflecting on the practice and achievement of others whom they have observed directing
Team workers	acting in roles under the direction of others
Self-managers	sourcing and providing props etc for productions
Effective participants	working towards and in performances.

● Functional Skills – Level 2

Skill	When learners are ...
ICT – Find and select information	researching historical production context of specific texts researching rehearsal methods of directing practitioners
English	discussing texts, production features etc presenting views/intentions and text preparation for a potential production giving presentation/demonstrations about historical production contexts and about practitioners.