

Moderators' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2015

GCE Drama & Theatre Studies
(6DR03) Unit 3: Exploration of Drama
Performance

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Unit 3 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. Performance Support candidates should submit a presentation to camera, maximum 10 minutes long, to support the skill they have offered.

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 2015 series

Stimulus Materials

The starting point for this unit is the introduction of the stimulus material/s. There is no doubt that a strong stimulus is essential in providing candidates with a clear starting point. For many centres the introduction of the stimulus has become an exciting event in its own right. Teachers are planning a wide range of materials to inspire, guide and support their candidates. 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. As this unit has become more established, centres are becoming more confident about what will work best for their own students, indeed, for each individual

cohort. There can be a clear correlation between the amount of teacher/centre input and the quality of the final performance, though there are still instances, where candidates make much of whatever they are presented with. It has become a given that centres will have studied a range of practitioners and seen as much live theatre as possible. Frantic Assembly remains the most popular influence, whether students have seen one of their productions or participated in a Frantic workshop, or both. Workshops by Splendid were also popular as well as other groups of practitioners offering devising pathways to centres.

It is usually possible to see these influences, particularly with movement sequences in the final performances. At best, students had used the workshops to enhance and support their own original work, at worst, there was a direct copying or emulating of a 'Frantic' movement exchange; the chair duets were most noticeable with some excellent variations on this theme. Very occasionally, it felt as if the routines 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.

There were still a good number of students who had seen Punchdrunk's performance of 'The Drowned Man' and this was used either in its own right or for generating ideas. While it would be impossible to recreate something on this scale, it gave rise to a number of site specific performances, promenade performances and in particular, interaction with the audience. The latter became a problem in itself, as some centres weren't able to distinguish between audience interaction and involving 'extras' in rehearsed moments. This in turn, began to impact on the perceived numbers in a group when the 'extras' became performance members.

A full range of practitioners are studied 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. A small selection of ideas is listed below. A few centres had used a visit to an interesting or unusual building or exhibition as the starting point. Verbatim theatre was increasingly used even if was just evident in sections of the final piece.

Stimuli included:

Local (to the centre) history, The Magdalene Laundries, mental health issues, war, identity, prison or being trapped, the advantages and disadvantages of social media, the role of women, child abuse, racist abuse, human trafficking, Syria, grooming, victimization, control, autism, Thatcher in the 1980's, The Kray twins, immigration, radicalisation, modern slavery,

Playtexts and novels used were:

Blood Wedding, 1984, A Clockwork Orange, Our Country's Good, The Cherry Orchard, The Pillowman, Fear and Misery in the Third Reich, 'Shoot, Get Treasure, Repeat', The Crucible, extracts from – Pinter, Arthur Conan Doyle, Angela Carter and Claire Dowey.

Performances to specific audiences tended to work well and choosing a specific audience is actually in keeping with the demands of the specification. There continued to be an increase in site-specific and promenade work, this can lead to really exciting performances but it is still essential to capture the work properly 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 was less evidence of centres appearing to leave candidates to find their own starting point, so it is heartening to report that the selection of the stimulus was embraced fully by teacher-examiners.

There appeared to be a decline in the number of Directing/Design/Performance Support candidates. In centres that did have a design candidate, they tended to be very well integrated in an inclusive manner akin to industry professionals.

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.

SWEDS

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. It was good practice when teacher-examiners were marking up where 3,500 words fell on SWEDs that were too long.

There were fewer candidates submitting SWEDs that were considerably under the 3,500 word limit. This year, even the weaker candidates were using the word count to its full or nearly full potential and this resulted in slightly stronger work at the lower end. Teacher examiners must recognize that work that is considerably less than the word limit has much further to go if students 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 real depth 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 are still a 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 and highlighted the thought process clearly using specific examples from rehearsal. Less successful SWEDs seemed to be teacher generated/taught responses and there was some evidence of the use of writing frames that produced work that is very formulaic.

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. However, it is not a requirement to include dates. 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.

Watching a film or YouTube per se does not in itself constitute 'research'. It is what you do with the materials sourced that makes for effective research.

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. Top band answers were able to analyse how exploration had impacted on the role/s.

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 and Splendid 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 less prominently than in the past. While lower band candidates seemed to present a 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. The three pieces of theatre that were cited the most were Frantic's 'Othello', Splendid's 'Woyzek' and 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the night time'

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 identified audience is a requirement of this unit.

Audience questionnaires and talkback sessions can be useful. As with any questionnaire, it is the quality of the question asked that can produce the most useful responses. 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.

There are now very few SWEDs submitted in an inappropriate format. Exemplar work, training events and time have all ensured that any serious deviations from the requirements of the specification are in the minority. 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. There was a

marked increase in the use of footnotes this year. In the main, these had to be ignored if they took the main document over the 3,500 word limit.

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 many over-long pieces this year. The absolute maximum time limit from pre-show to the end of the performance is 30 minutes. Moderators cannot watch beyond this point, which in a minority of cases meant that some candidates were sold short if they didn't appear until this time. It is more appropriate that a small group of performers i.e. 3 students, perform for around 15-20 minutes.

The performance mark given must accurately reflect what each candidate has achieved within the 30 minute examination frame.

There continued to be an 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 was raised in previous reports and still remains an issue in 2015. There were still too many centres sending incorrectly formatted DVD recordings. It is essential that centres check that the recordings play on a domestic DVD player before they are submitted. 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. The greatest difficulty this year was with centre's placing the camera to one side, which didn't support the performers at all well. 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 much of the screen obscured, missing action or even missing performers, heard but never seen.

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.

In cases where there were issues with the DVD, centres were all very keen to submit back up copies when requested. 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 although not a requirement, they were helpful to the moderation process.

Good centres introduced candidates in their costume and clearly highlighted any costume changes. This was not always the case and there are still centres that dress all candidates in the same colour, which makes identification very difficult. Similarly, identification to camera in clothes other than costume can make things confusing for the moderator. Many pieces still have all the performers wearing black in which case they must wear something else such as a coloured sash to make identification possible.

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.

Most centres are now aware of the need to film Performance Support candidates; this was usually done before the performance with or without an audience present and proved an invaluable way for candidates to explain their rationale to the moderator, often using practical examples.

As mentioned above, there appeared to be a decrease in the number of Designers this year, although of the ones seen, there was some very good work indeed. 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. 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

The thorny issue of groups exceeding 6 candidates continues to be a problem. 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. In recent years, centres submitting a group of 7 performers are referred to the Business Assurance team. Permission to work as a group of 7 performers will never be granted.

While the number of centres taking this unit remains stable, the number of candidates within the centres has fallen slightly. This results in smaller centres either working as a consortium or having to use bona fide students to make the group size up to 3 (maximum) by using one or two non-examined candidates as appropriate, thus ensuring parity between all centres. When this happens, the maximum group size absolutely must not exceed 3. 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 there was evidence to suggest that centres were over rewarding work towards the top end. Some centres were consistently generous with the marks for performance and Development and Structure and moderators felt it necessary to comment on this or even to reduce the marks to bring the centre in line with the national standard. 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 possibly recruiting a different calibre of student. Most of the work seen at the lower end had been completed in good faith and it was heartening to see that candidates had still got a lot from the unit completing all required elements.

Candidates were best supported when teacher-assessors marked and annotated the written work, as they would do normally. Some centres submit course work for examination purposes that has no marks or annotation on it at all.

There still remains a lot of work submitted for an examination that is not named. 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 and every 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, all 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.

A small number of centres 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. Perhaps the greatest error this year was in the addition of numbers or transferring marks from the work to the optems. The teacher-examiner needs to facilitate and check the organization of these small but vitally important administrative tasks. Moderators felt that much time was wasted in chasing details such as this. Examination Officers were unfailingly prompt and helpful when trying to resolve these issues.

Centres working in a consortium MUST inform the drama assessment team as soon as possible, ideally in the Autumn term, so that all the work can be sent to the same moderator.

Unit 3 remains a challenging unit for the A2 year, but in the main a highly enjoyable one for all concerned. 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.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>

