

Drama

2010 ASSESSMENT REPORT

Arts Learning Area



Government
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SACE
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DRAMA

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GENERAL COMMENTS

Again this year moderators commented on the privilege of witnessing the commitment and creativity of teachers and students of Drama. The written and practical work continues to reflect the passionate engagement of students and teachers in all components of the subject.

The *analysis* criterion for both report and reviews continued to be the biggest challenge for students. Generally, students focused on *what* they saw without meaningfully examining *why* and *how* decisions were made. For review writing, the best choice of live theatre and films are those that contain professional production values and artistic merit.

Moderators highlighted the professional manner with which teachers approached assessment procedures. With this in mind, it is important for teachers to:

- consult the *Learning Area Manual* to ensure that appropriate procedures are followed
- be in attendance and assess student performances and/or presentations for the entire duration of a production/individual study presentation
- read and follow instructions and advice from the SACE Board
- regularly check the SACE website for updates of support materials.

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT 1: PERFORMANCE

It was evident that the group production was a highlight of the course. Generally, teachers and students were well prepared and aware of their responsibilities in the assessment process. Teachers were vigilant with the preparation of assessment sheets. Off-stage interviews were scheduled at times that gave students and teachers time to prepare for the performance without adding undue pressure.

Moderators commented on the positive atmosphere and excitement of students who were participating in the group production. Clearly, this assessment component is highly valued, enjoyed by students and teachers alike, and serves as an important way of demonstrating on- and off-stage talents and learning in a visible, public manner. It continues to be a celebration of the class' achievements when they perform for their peers, families and the wider community.

For the group production, teachers selected from a broad range of scripts. The choice of script is pivotal to the success of the group production and most teachers successfully 'cast the play to the group'. This provided a successful vehicle for students to showcase their skills and talents against the assessment criteria in both on- and off-stage roles. Due to factors such as the difficulty of obtaining rights, some teachers produced plays sourced from the Internet. Despite the teachers' best intentions, these plays often diminished students' chances of success because of their poorly written scripts. Some teachers produced two short plays so that every student had the opportunity to have their 'focus time' on stage. This generally worked well, however it is recommended that teachers be aware of the time required for rehearsals.

Extended works, while challenging students, can create an excessive workload. When plays exceeded 90 minutes and contained a dense amount of text, moderators found that performances tended to contain 'recitation', and that students focused on learning lines rather than addressing the assessment criteria. While ensuring that 'on-stage performers

should be able to give a focused performance of between 10 and 15 minutes', when performances did not exceed 90 minutes, actors were obviously rehearsed to a level of confidence and competence, and this allowed them sufficient scope to build character and sustain their roles.

There were a few instances of actors playing multiple roles. While this can provide an opportunity to showcase a student's versatility, at times it was difficult for moderators to recognise performers, particularly when identical make-up and costumes were worn and characters were not called by their names on stage. It is vital for teachers to provide clear documentation and/or colour coding via costuming.

Students will achieve success through diligently learning lines and developing their character; however, in some cases actors required prompting, and/or their character development was minimal. Teachers are asked to take this into consideration when making an assessment of how students have contributed to the ensemble.

There were instances when students with off-stage responsibilities were allocated another role, and on some occasions students seemed to be a 'jack of all trades'. This disadvantages students, because it is then not possible to explore the role in-depth, and interpret its place within the ensemble. The most successful students chose a focused area of study. Students fare well if they have considered a range of theatrical elements (e.g. costumes, set, sound, lighting, properties), especially in off-stage interviews and the group production report.

It is beneficial for students if teachers explicitly develop and communicate a conceptual approach to their directing that is based on a solid vision for the production. When teachers shared a clear directorial vision that was explicitly linked to a dramatic theory, style or movement, the ensemble work was of a high calibre. Each performer and off-stage presenter then had complete confidence in their role, and astute knowledge of how they contributed to the overall themes and concepts of the play. This also translated into a higher quality of analysis in the production report.

Students in off-stage roles were generally under-prepared for their interviews. The more successful students spoke with conviction about the ways in which they used dramatic ideas in their design/product, and they had evidently thought about the assessment criteria, considered what would not be clear unless verbally communicated, and then focused on these elements. Students who presented their work in an unrehearsed, spontaneous manner, without any notes or evidence of their role in a production, highlighted what the student did *not* do, rather than what they did (or should have done) in their role. Including notes that merely add to the girth of a folder does not contribute to the final assessment.

It is essential that teachers have enough 'distance' from the production to assess their students realistically and dispassionately on the evidence presented at the time of assessment. It might be a worthwhile exercise to invite another drama teacher to view the production before the final assessment.

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT 2: PRESENTATION

Moderators were impressed with the wide range of studies this year. Acting, film-making and costume design were the most popular choices. Overall, the most successful studies were those where students chose a clearly focused question, demonstrated thorough preparation, as well as a sound dramatic basis or foundation throughout the study, and presented an engaging final product. Other successful studies were those that demonstrated genuine student interest. For example, a student who already had an interest in song and/or dance might have chosen a study which explored an aspect of musical theatre. Students who used a drama script or the works of a theorist or playwright for their study provided themselves

with substantial, valid, dramatic material for the task, and they were therefore more likely to have a substantial answer to the dramatic question they set themselves.

The *synthesis* criterion continued to present the greatest challenge for students. Teachers need to ensure that thorough preparation includes opportunities to rehearse the evaluative and analytical requirements of these presentations. The more successful studies were those where students had researched a specific style or approach and used that as a basis to develop a product. Less successful studies needed to convey a greater sense of investigation. Those who had not appropriately clarified their area of study, or who began with a product and worked backwards, were disorganised in their approach and rarely addressed the *synthesis* criterion in much depth. To ensure a valid, interesting investigation, planning is essential. An individual study is not intended to be a broad, generalised examination of a field of dramatic study. Students who narrowed the scope of their study fared the best. For example, examining costumes related to a period in history, such as the late 19th Century, is too broad and will result in an inconclusive study. However, by examining costumes worn in the Oscar Wilde play *The Importance of being Earnest*, the student can demonstrate an understanding of text, the characters' involvement in the play, Wilde's humour, and other related aspects of learning. When the student integrates research information into their discussion they are demonstrating a closer understanding of the theory involved.

Students who were successful worked on a study that had a practical outcome, such as developing publicity for the school musical, or a workshop for a Year 8 or 9 class that was studying Ancient Greek theatre. The only issue to consider when doing this is to ensure that the study is individual and not reliant on the research or ideas of others.

The *presentation* criterion was generally addressed successfully. Moderators were pleased with the effort that students made to create interesting presentations. Adding dramatic elements such as adopting a persona through which to present material, readings, performance, slideshows, film, and illustrations demonstrated audience-consciousness and enhanced their work.

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT 3: REPORT

Group Production Report

The assessment criteria aim to identify how well each student contributes and develops during the process of a dramatic production. The report is a document in which students should analyse their learning during the development of the production and as they participate in workshops and rehearsals.

The most successful reports contained a strong personal voice and provided a clear exploration of the production process, including connections between playwright and directorial intent; they also demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of the student's role. These reports analysed the text and production holistically. Key moments and staging choices were a focus and provided an effective way in which to demonstrate an understanding through *analysis* and *interpretation*. In addition to identifying the style of the production, the more successful reports observed *how* this style became apparent on stage. The roles undertaken were considered as a part of the bigger picture, which highlighted the importance of directors sharing their vision with the students. The reports were edited carefully to ensure that they had a clear and logical structure, with appropriate paragraphing and polished prose, as well as the use of appropriate dramatic terminology. These reports did not exceed the word limit (beyond which moderators do not read). Some of the stronger reports successfully used diagrams, especially by those students who had taken on an off-stage role. By appropriately referring to them, they enhanced their discussion.

Less successful reports were descriptive, contained too much general discussion, and therefore did not meet the criteria of *analysis* and *evaluation*. They predominantly contained 'recount' in a diary style format and used this as a vehicle to vent frustrations and disappointments. These reports were lacking in the *communication* criterion. They contained a random arrangement of paragraphs rather than a logical sequence of information.

Evaluation still appears to be problematic as it is often addressed by focusing on the final outcome rather than the director's intent and/or the initial vision for the production. Consideration for, and engagement of, the audience should not be an after-thought and needs to be measured against whether the directorial vision was achieved. It is important to provide students with a clear directorial concept as this helps to provide an opportunity for discussion about text interpretation and the use of style and dramatic elements in the lead up to, and including, the performance.

Individual Study Report

The curriculum statement defines the individual study report as a document in which students should *analyse* their learning during the development of the study.

The most successful reports maintained a focus on the criteria for judging performance: *intention, planning and processes, evaluation and communication*. They firmly established the intention of the study by identifying a clear dramatic question, and demonstrated a strong connection between the process of their study and the outcome. Resources were referred to and clearly referenced in a bibliography.

An important aspect of the criterion *planning and processes*, is for students to analyse their learning. The most successful reports evaluated all aspects of the study, including the presentation itself, and provided a clear description and analysis of the final dramatic product. The less successful reports contained recount in a diary-style format and lacked *evaluation*, and relied on re-using what they had presented for the moderator.

As with the group production, the more successful individual study reports were edited carefully to ensure that they contained a logical structure, with appropriate paragraphing and polished *communication*, including the use of appropriate dramatic terminology. The reports did not exceed the word limit (beyond which moderators do not read).

ASSESSMENT COMPONENT 4: REVIEWS

Students were required to present two reviews, based on their viewing of two live performances, or one live and one screen performance. Both reviews could be oral, or both could be written, or one could be oral and one written

Live theatre productions that are selected for the purpose of review writing should be generally accessible and contain professional production values and artistic merit. However, some of the film choices lacked the production elements conducive to in-depth analysis. Overall, moderators noted that both live theatre and film reviews were well structured and adhered to review writing conventions. There were no oral reviews submitted for final (central) moderation.

The more successful live theatre reviews were holistic and generated a clear 'word picture' (*communication* criterion). They explored key moments in an integrated manner, evaluated the production's overall impact on the viewer, and were analytical; they demonstrated a strong connection with the text, together with a comprehensive understanding of the intent of

the director and writer. There was evidence of significant background knowledge, cultural and historical context, thematic concerns, and stylistic features.

The less successful reviews were formulaic, often plot-driven, and lacked *analysis* and *evaluation* of how theatrical elements, when combined, achieve a director's vision. When a review focuses only on plot, themes and characters, it reads more like a literary style of review as opposed to a film/theatre review. It is not relevant to include reviews of the 'question and answer' sessions that some theatre companies provide post-production.

The most successful film reviews contained a cinematic point of view. When students choose films to review, it is suggested that teachers spend time exploring cinema techniques, and help students to increase their confidence in the use of filmic language and conventions which will allow them to provide appropriate *analysis* and *evaluation*. Less successful film reviews relied on a discussion of plot, themes and characters. Moderators also commented on the following features of teachers' assessments of the reviews and reports:

- it is important for teachers to follow correct procedures for selecting samples for moderation, as outlined in the *Learning Area Manual*
- teachers need to be prepared to use the full range of grades. Students meet criteria to differing degrees and it is important for teachers to discriminate in assessing the relative 'distances' between students' grades – including the lower range
- if information from the Internet, program notes, teacher notes or other sources has been used in a review or report, it needs to be acknowledged
- teachers are asked to be vigilant in both identifying and reporting plagiarism
- students need to adhere to maximum word limits.

Chief Assessor
Drama