

Metacognition with Year 13 Drama 2015 – HORSFORTH SCHOOL, S.KENDAL

WHY?

The devising element of the A Level Edexcel Unit 3 is always a tricky one. Students begin full of ideas and desperate to get started on their own drama, however, just weeks later they become stuck on just HOW to get their ideas onto paper and how to make sure they evidence their planning to show development.

This module seemed a great way of introducing Metacognition as marks are awarded for how pupils plan. I wanted them to be aware of the following:

- **How they plan**
- **How they record their planning**
- **How their planning helps them move forward**
- **The most effective ways of working together...**
- **The best ways to collate ideas**
- **The best ways to experiment and CHANGE ideas**
- **How their planning helps them write their coursework**

First of all I did a basic survey which asked students to consider the thought process behind something they did every lesson and had been doing since Year 7 – planning the drama.

It was quite basic, but was the first step in making them think about their thinking!

Examples of survey questions

- Do you make individual or group notes?
- Who writes the notes in your planning lessons?
- Will you write down EVERY idea that someone gives or just the 'good' ones?
- Do you prefer to write down your ideas first THEN experiment practically or vice versa?
- How do you show development of ideas in your work?

All the questions were open response to provide students with an opportunity to answer fully.

The main findings (from the 9 students) were that they hadn't actually THOUGHT about their planning enough and mentioned phrases such as *'we talk about our ideas and one of us makes notes-usually me'** and that *'you don't think about how you plan – you just do it'* **

Further discussion found that whoever wrote the notes usually had the neatest handwriting or had remembered their pen! The 'just do it' idea was common throughout the whole group –it was instinctive. However, as they are actually graded on their planning and development of ideas it seemed important to deconstruct the planning from something they 'just do' to something they could do better.

We all agreed it was not the ACTING or PERFORMING they found hard, but how to plan in a more 'evidenced' way for the exam board. The students need to write 3500 words about the process, the knowledge of which increased their motivation to track and document their planning more effectively.

*Group 1

** Group 2

WHAT NEXT?

My next step was to show the marking criteria for the module in more detail.

This allowed the students to realise that planning was not just important for MAKING the drama happen but also for a PROCESS mark and in addition it forms the basis of the COURSEWORK mark.

There is a mark for

DEVELOPMENT AND STRUCTURE – (PLANNING AND CREATING THE DRAMA- MARKED BY TEACHER)

PERFORMANCE- (FILMED AND MODERATED VIA DVD RECORDING)

RESEARCH AND EXPLORATION/EVALUATION (WRITTEN COURSEWORK)

1) Research and exploration: 15 marks

Students demonstrate outstanding depth of research that is far-reaching and comprehensive. It is clear how the research has directly influenced performance outcomes and practice for both self and others.

2) Development and structure: 15 marks

Students demonstrate an outstanding involvement in the developmental process with a creative and imaginative input that has a far reaching benefit to both their own work and the work of others.

3) Performance: 15 marks

Students demonstrate outstanding skills within the compass of their chosen role or roles within the assessed performance. Their contribution to the performance comprehensively communicates their intentions to the audience.

4) Evaluation: 15 marks

Students produce an outstanding evaluation of the process and performance. Perceptive links are made between the influence of research, developmental activity and the performance taking significant note of the involvement of self and appreciative contribution of others.

Only number 3 is assessed on acting alone- all the others rely on group work, planning and evaluating.

This helped the group realise the value of good planning sessions, the need to document well and to be able to link planning to progression practically.

We also analysed the coursework questions in more detail!

- 1. How is the initial material being researched and developed at significant stages during the process of creating drama?*
- 2. How effectively are you personally exploring and developing your roles?*
- 3. How did you and your group explore the possibilities of form, structure and performance style?*
- 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?*
- 5. How successfully did your final performance communicate your aims and intentions for the piece to your audience?*
- 6. How effectively did the social, cultural, historical/political context of the piece communicate to your audience?*

Looking at the list of questions used for the coursework was also useful as they **highlighted key words** such as *developed* and *explored* which showed how important the process of planning was in answering these questions fully. This helped the group to appreciate the evolving nature of the process and how planning and documenting their ideas effectively would really help them answer these complex questions.

Strategies

THE SPECIAL BOOK

The introduction of a 'special book' was something we introduced at GCSE when working in big groups. This idea of a collective planning book (the special book) was seen as fun at GCSE, but it now needed to become their drama bible at A2 level.

One of the tasks when receiving the book was to cover or decorate the book in pictures related to their theme. This was something they really enjoyed as they wanted to make the books look good however, more importantly for me they were actually really talking and discussing their theme and ideas in more detail whilst selecting appropriate ideas for the cover of their books.

With this idea in mind I made sure that the books this year were A3 size books, not A4 as they are at GCSE. These books were bought from the Art Department (sketch books) and this less formal approach (no lines) allowed us to be more experimental in our ideas on planning and selecting methods for recording planning ideas.

Initial ideas

I gave the group a number of ways they could consider to help them structure their planning and each lesson one member of the group was responsible for a different way of facilitating and documenting the planning.

The class was divided into two groups, a group of 4 and a group of 5, so each lesson one student could choose a method of planning that they enjoyed or thought that would work for them:

- Storyboard your ideas
- Using colours to differentiate between ideas given and who gave them
- Make a mind map
- Use coloured post it notes and then stick them in to show the array of ideas you had
- Make doddles or drawings to help you visually remember the ideas
- Chronologically write down who said what (like minutes of a meeting)

This did mean however that one person was very much limited to 'evidencing' rather than offering ideas, but as we have double lessons I always made sure that this was only for half of our 2-hour lesson, or even just 45 minutes. The students are always encouraged to plan **on their feet** as this is a practical subject, but as mentioned before it is not the practical element that they struggle with!

At the end of the 4 lessons (2 weeks) groups then discussed and fed back which way was the best way to note down ideas – which way was easiest to pick up from next lessons – which one would help when it came to writing their 3500 word essay.

Feedback mainly favoured 2 ways:

One – the minutes approach – they felt it accurately covered what was said and was in chronological order

Two – the mind map – they liked this way as it was visual and the stems of the mind map showed how their ideas could go off at different tangents and this was useful in future planning. However, sometimes the ‘look’ of the mind map or doddle would become the focus more than the planning, something I needed to keep on top of as one group’s visually impressive ‘special book’ was often to the detriment of the planning itself!!

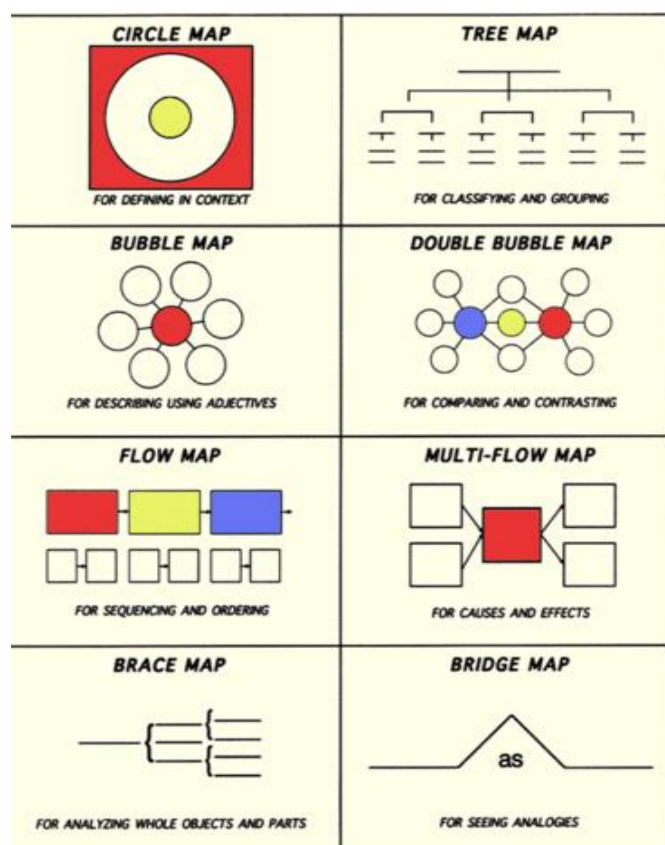
The girls in particular favoured the mind map and I would often find them mind mapping on a large scale on a white board in the studio or in a classroom – they would then photograph the maps and put them on ‘group chat’ or I would print them off and add them to the ‘book’.

Developing the ideas further

Thinking diagrams (developed by Dr. David Hyerle)

When sharing the thinking diagrams at our SLDM I could see immediately how they may help Year 13 in their planning. So when we had moved on from the excitement of our initial ideas, and the groups had their main ideas at the ready, I introduced them to thinking diagrams as a way of developing their ideas to create a larger piece of drama.

I thought the process of selecting and using the maps would be ideal. The idea of detecting the patterns in the thinking maps would help them detect links and patterns in their own devised drama. Also the thinking maps provided a visual interest, using images to capture ideas and develop ideas - this links well to creating a visual piece of drama.



We found that the maps fitted nicely into the following coursework questions:

How effectively are you personally exploring and developing your roles?

Circle map allowed students to start with character and then use the map to look at inner and outer characterisation.

How is the initial material being researched and developed at significant stages during the process of creating drama?

Bubble/double bubble map – allowed students to see how things linked together – research and influences.

How did you and your group explore the possibilities of form, structure and performance style?

Tree map /Brace/Sequencing –these helped so see how scenes link – useful for planning the structure of the play- form and structure question- also very visual to see where you piece is going.

How successfully did your final performance communicate your aims and intentions for the piece to your audience?

Multi flow map – good for cause and effect and this was vital when planning ‘intentions for audience and how they would do this.

Through-out the difficult planning stages I allowed students to use any of the thinking maps and encouraged them to think of different ways of documenting the ideas (as per initial ideas). There were copies of the maps available and sugar paper and pens- sometimes they copied the maps into the books – more than often they did them on sugar paper and took a photo on their phone!

The special book was still a main focus and was left in school in case someone forgot to bring it in!

The book proved useful throughout the planning and then vital when writing up coursework.

Rehearsing – when rehearsing the plays, the performing took over and the planning was done. Other ideas we explored in this area were filming their work and giving self and peer analysis and also performing for chosen groups to get focused feedback off an audience.

Coursework

The module is 20 % coursework for this unit and this is where the ‘special book’ or notes/mind maps etc came in handy, as students had effectively documented throughout the planning which provided them with all the details they needed to answer the coursework questions. Lessons began by looking at what content students needed to cover in each question – this was done generically and then with each group individually to make sure they had relevant specific examples. Both the thinking maps and the special book were useful to help the groups track their progress and find examples to back up their ideas.

The final ‘book’ was more useful to group 1 who enjoyed mind maps and visually representing ideas as they found it easier to follow. Having an Art student in this group may have helped, but more to do with enjoying documenting ideas rather than just being good at drawing!! Group 2 took a more narrative approach (due to laziness or lack of artistic talent or even lack of time!!) This did mean that sometimes

that their notes were not always easy to follow, in some cases this slowed down the process of writing coursework as at times they were rewriting what they had already done. This in particular made the group reflect on the value of evidencing good planning earlier to ease the later stages of writing!

Final findings and evaluation

I had very much (at post 16) encouraged but not FORCED these ideas – devising in Drama is a very creative process and forcing someone to use a brace map does not make good practice. However, I did find that those who were naturally more curious or interested in ways of making their own learning more varied responded to the ideas more fully – with better results. Both groups produced interesting and credible pieces of drama and it was clear that the planning and performance elements were very different in terms of application/talent and marks.

I would like to add in a media element next time – pupils could film their planning or record it aurally. This could then be transcribed for the 'book' or uploaded to google drive to share with the rest of the group. Students could also have the option of having their whole book on line and share pictures and magazine articles this way.

I realise that the work I have done with Year 13 is merely the start of getting them to deconstruct 'just what they do' but my aim is to follow this up further to allow them to do just do what they do ..but better!!