

Level 6 The Arts - Working with Texts in Drama

PEEL in Practice: 1300 ideas for quality teaching

Andrew Kolb, McKinnon Secondary College

Ever since Year 10 Drama was reduced to a semester unit, I've had problems with a key assessment task, the Ensemble Performance. How do I inspire students to develop a love and commitment to a group performance, when many are disengaged and lacking in commitment to the performance of a One Act Play, within a six-week time frame? Until Semester 1 this year, this has been a hit or miss affair. Many fine and committed drama students have been let down by their lazy, immature and self absorbed peers, who failed to engage meaningfully with the set task. These students would fail to set realistic goals, use the rehearsal process seriously, learn their lines by a negotiated date or reflect on their meagre efforts. The key problem could be identified as a failure to accept ownership of the set task. This is when, out of the necessity to save my sanity, using PEEL ideas, I set about reorganising the Ensemble Performance Assessment Task.

Firstly we decided to reduce the task Criteria Sheet from ten criteria to six. Using collaborative group work we devised the six criteria we would all agree to. Most students were reluctant to learn a whole One Act play from their 'Big Dramas' text, citing other school and outside commitments, while others were disappointed with such negative attitudes. I decided to offer students the choice of being assessed on the performance of a selected play or the performance of a key scene from David Williamson's 'The Removalist.' I selected this scene for four actors on the basis that it presented sufficient challenges for student actors: strongly contrasted characters, good subtext, fine stage directions, opportunity for status work and strong use of body language. I decided early on that each student would have to grade each group according to the student devised criteria sheet. This was to maintain focus and gain insights from different interpretations of the same scene.

Students were permitted to choose their own groups. Because there were more females in the group some of the girls took on male roles and in one group a male decided to take on the challenging role of Fiona, an abused female. This worked very well indeed forcing the actors and the audience to confront stereotypes and stretch comfort zones. During the rehearsal process, students were encouraged to experiment and take risks with their dialogue, movement and use of body language. A role-play game called Hot Seat was used to extend characterization beyond the scripted page. In Hot Seat, a student (sitting in the hot seat) stays in what they believe to be the persona of the character as they respond to unscripted questions from their peers. These questions might be about why they did something, what they thought about the action of another character, how they would respond to a hypothetical scenario and so on.

Students were given a final performance date and were told that each performance would be videoed. Students were also required to use their drama journals to set realistic goals and reflect on each rehearsal.

The video proved to be a great tool in analysing the criteria based performances, which were then used to create an extended piece of reflection on the performances. Dress rehearsals were also videoed and students were given the option of a second or

even third shoot. A reflection sheet was completed by each Ensemble group to gauge and reflect on the process of learning. I felt that the processes used throughout this Unit were sound and succeeded in engaging most students.