

THE CRITICAL CASE FOR GP (GROUP PERFORMANCE)

Published in 2015, Rachael Jacobs' PhD research examined Senior Secondary Drama assessment in NSW, Queensland the ACT. A significant section of the research was devoted to an investigation of the GP (Group Performance) component of the NSW Drama HSC. The PhD reports data from Drama teachers and students that tell us about the unique qualities of this task. The findings are summarised in this document, with anonymised comments from students and teachers.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- Live performance assessed by external assessors drives creates a higher standard of performance
- Teachers find live assessment of GP to be trustworthy and critically important to drama students' development
- External assessment provides an excellent professional learning opportunity for teachers
- GP mirrors the demands of drama and theatre professions, as well as other creative professions
- Students value a collaborative assessment, stating that GP provides them with a creative, peer learning experience unmatched by any other HSC task
- Assessing performance using a video recording leaves assessors compromised and do not capture the full experience of live theatre

TEACHERS

The HSC Drama GP is a kind of capstone task, externally examined by live assessors in a way that judges each group performance in relation to others in the state. Jacobs' research found that NSW Drama teachers have a high degree of satisfaction with GP. Additionally, those involved marking the GP find the process to be *"the best professional learning I've ever had"*. While teachers have minor points of frustration with implementation of the GP, they overall find it to be a trustworthy way to assess students' performances in comparison to others in the state. Teachers are particularly fond of the rigour created by live, external assessors visiting their school.

Drama teacher: I've never seen students aim higher than when they know an external assessor is coming to watch them. Even if they don't want an ATAR. Even if they aren't going to university. There's a kind of pride in their performance when it has to be delivered to an impartial stranger.

Drama teacher: It's one of the best ways that we can make it fair and a comparable standard. You really are very close to your students' work and you need an external face to come in, with no knowledge of the situation, and give the students the result they deserve. I don't see any other way to do it that's as fair. There are a lot of variables in schools. Public, private, good facilities and bad, and this is really the only way to have a fair expectation of everyone so you can compare them properly...It's like the moment of truth.

STUDENTS

Document analysis found that the GP is consistent with the syllabus intentions, in particular that drama 'is a collaborative art form that involves the creative interaction of individuals using a range of artistic skills' (NSW Board of Studies, 2009, p. 6). So, what do students learn from doing the GP? Previous research (Hatton & Lovesy, 2009; Lovesy, 2002) found GP to be rich in peer learning and peer evaluation. Individuals develop empathy for each other and the group develops an identity through using its own voice and language. Student comments from Jacobs' study supports these findings:

*Student: Everyone brings something different and creative to the group. While is a bit frustrating, we solve the problems because ultimately, we have to show it to a stranger in August, so we have to be so clear. And, you know, you can't have your way all the time, but I guess that makes the performance better. **There's no other assignment that gets us to negotiate like this.***

Student: I'm a bit of a school leader, I guess. Like I'm School Captain and stuff. Our group was honestly the only place where people regularly question and challenge me, and now I understand it's a good way to be. In our group nobody is smarter or dumber or better or whatever, we're just all working towards the same goal which is a good performance.

Student: Performing such an important performance to strangers is scary, but I guess it's good. If I want to go into acting, this will be a normal [expectation].

THE LIMITATIONS OF VIDEO RECORDINGS

All teachers in Jacobs' study considered videos to be a poor replication of live performance. Some described video recordings as a clinical tool, adding that an emotional response is not elicited from a video recording. Other state that sound quality and lighting are compromised, plus the presence of a barrier between the actor and audience (i.e. a screen) hinders the impact of the performance. The correlates with previous research that asserts that theatre is a relationship between the performer and the spectator in a shared space where both come together. Video evidence cannot reproduce the live performance experience (McAuley, 1999) and video recordings of live drama are 'respectful forgeries' at best (De Marinis 1985, p. 389).

Jacobs' PhD research compared systems of assessment and moderation of drama performances in NSW with Queensland and the ACT where video recordings are used to moderate standards and verify grades. The research found that video recordings did not give assessors and accurate representation of performance. One ACT teacher stated "we are not able to see what the audience sees.". In fact, at the time of the ACT teachers changed their assessment system to include live performances assessment in order to make quality judgements about students' work. For the purposes of verifying grades, teachers found video recordings to be basic and acceptable, but to assess performance, it was inadequate.

FULL THESIS

<https://researchdirect.westernsydney.edu.au/islandora/object/uws:30268/datastream/PDF/view>

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