

Analysing assessment: adding value through ongoing AFL in your subject.

Assessment for Learning (AfL) is an essential part of any lesson of drama. It is an element that makes a lesson purposeful and progressive, rather than stagnant and directionless. As stated very poignantly in Paul Black and Dylan William's 'Inside the Black Box' journal: 'tasks have to be justified in terms of the of the learning aims that they serve, and they can only work well if [there are] opportunities for pupils to communicate their evolving understanding' (Black 1998, p10). It is this ideology that is deep-rooted within my AfL strategies.

In this blog, I will explore the extent of which AfL is important within a drama lesson and how I have used AfL consistently in my own practice. To critically analyse my use of AfL, I will use the example of a specific year 7 class (which I will refer to as 7.1), illustrating a broader view of AfL being utilised within a classroom and allow for closer examination of specific techniques.

Generally, the focus of a drama lesson is the devising, performance and reflection of drama. Due to this clear system, the challenge that faces drama teachers is to incorporate AfL without stunting the fluidity of the lesson; ultimately including tasks that will progress learning. Drama educational theorist, Helen Nicholson, suggests there are three main opportunities for AfL within a lesson: 'questioning, observation, reflection' (Nicholson 2001, p126). I will use this statement from Nicholson to structure my own findings of using AfL in relation to performance and reflection.

In my own practice, I have found observation to be vital part of a typical drama lesson, allowing students the opportunity to develop independently through rehearsal and to practice their technique through performance. In terms of rehearsal time, the teacher can 'gauge which students are having their own ideas and helping others shape theirs' (Kempe 2000, p48). This is an improvised type AfL, but it is essential, as it allows students to try new skills practically in a controlled environment.

One example includes a 7.1 lesson on mine (see image 1.1). Through observation, I was able to assess whether the students could practically demonstrate these specific techniques. One student, who I will refer to as Student A, a LAP, could confidently state the

key considerations required to create a successful mime; however, practically, she found it difficult to demonstrate her understanding. Through observation during the rehearsal process, I realised she exaggerated her movement rather than appreciating the intricate nature of miming a medical operation, it allowed me the opportunity to work closely with her to develop the skills required to create a realistic mime; using the considerations of weight, shape and size to naturalistically perform the desired actions.

Y7 Introduction to Drama	
<p>We are learning about: Mime</p>	<p>Success Criteria:</p> <p>ALL – To be able to describe, understand and apply weight, size and shape in their own mime performance.</p> <p>SOME – Will sustain a high standard of mime skills in their performance to make the performance realistic to an audience.</p>
<p>We are learning to:</p> <p>ALL – Understand how to use the technique of mime effectively in a performance. By using size, weight and shape to create a realistic mime.</p> <p>SOME – Will be consistently aware of size, weight and shape in their own effective performance.</p>	
<p>SMSC Focus: Respecting others in performance and responding with positive and constructive feedback.</p> 	<p>Homework:</p>
<p>Literacy Focus: Key words and Terminology.</p> 	

(Image 1.1)

Again, using the group 7.1 in the following lesson, (see image 2.1) the aim of the lesson was to consolidate learning on stage directions. To assess, as a plenary, the students' clear understanding, I asked pupils to complete a task (see image 3.1). This was a fast-paced and effective way to assess knowledge, using observation to assess who was in the incorrect places, and thus which students needed extra support and clarification. One example of a student who benefited from this exercise was Student B, who incorrectly guessed where 'stage right' was, after a prompt that stage directions were always from the perspective of the actor, the student could establish his correct positioning. By merely clarifying key information, the student could independently work out his correct position, I was then confident that the student was clear on the application of stage directions for future lessons.

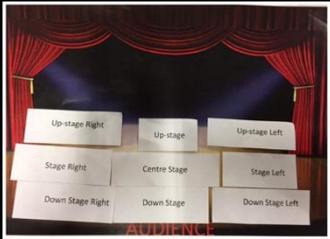
Y7 Introduction to Drama	
<p>We are learning about: Stage Directions</p>	<p>Success Criteria:</p> <p>ALL – To know what stage directions mean and apply them correctly.</p> <p>SOME – To direct their own mime using accurate stage directions.</p>
<p>We are learning to:</p> <p>ALL – Use previous knowledge of mime skills in order to show the shape, size and weight of an object. To be able to respond correctly to a director's stage directions.</p> <p>SOME – Sustain mime skills effectively and be able to understand why stage directions are important for a director and an actor.</p>	
<p>SMSC Focus: Respecting others in performance and responding with positive and constructive feedback.</p>	<p>Homework:</p>
<p>Literacy Focus: Key words and Terminology.</p>	

(Image 2.1)

5 GROUPS...1 MISSION

- 9 placards are placed in a row downstage.
- 9 students should be lined up against the upstage wall.
- On my instruction, you must run to a placard, pick it up and go to the area of the stage it states.
- The quickest person to be in their correct position wins a stamp!

FINISHED RESULT!



(Image 3.1)

Some may argue that performance could be viewed as AoL to review long-term learning, but performance can also be used as AfL to explore new skills and theory. As Kempe states, teachers must question ‘what performance indicators are there to suggest that the students are progressing? What can I see, hear or read that tells me what the students know, understand and can do?’ (Kempe 2000, p48). This probes the teacher to use

performance as a demonstration of learning and thus, the teacher will gauge what aspects need to be revisited to consolidate learning, or indeed to challenge the students further.

Finally, using Nicholson's idea that all effective AfL within drama lessons include reflection by the students, she elaborates on this idea by suggesting the teacher must 'relate reflection to the context of practical drama and so deepen the learning process' (Nicholson 2001, p127). This a valid argument, as without reflection, students would not identify weaknesses and therefore stunt progression. Academic, David Spendlove similarly suggests that self-assessment 'increas[es] the learner's autonomy and ownership [of their work...which in turn] also increases accountability' (Spendlove 2009, p108). This infers the importance of student responsibility, to develop the sense of value in their work.

In addition, teachers can assess student understanding, development of skills and challenge ideas by listening to student reflection, making the teacher's system for AfL well-rounded and thorough. For example, during another 7.1 lesson, we explored the techniques of tableaux. To achieve this required reflection, I gave students a visual stimulus to inspire their piece. After performing this tableau, I gave the students further information about the stimulus which altered their perspective. They then reflected on how this new context developed their performance; thus, using reflection to develop understanding both of their practical skills, and theoretically by analysing context (see images 4.1 & 5.1).

The result of the exercise was astounding. One small group of higher ability girls which I will refer to as Group 1 initially interpreted the image as group of happy schoolchildren; which was clear by the girls creating a tableau of the characters playing hopscotch together. However, after I explained the context of the picture and described what the children would have experienced, their tableau became thoughtful and saddening; depicting a mother waving her children off at a train station as they escaped the horrors of war. It was this student reflection and development which aided their understanding of tableaux and its profound effect on an audience member.

**Create a tableaux inspired by
this image...**



(Image 4.1)

**How does your tableaux
develop if I told you these
children were evacuees?**

**They have been sent from
their homes in the city into
the countryside where they
may not see their parents
again...**

(Image 5.1)

In conclusion, AfL is essential in every drama lesson. It is clear that teachers must use the results of AfL strategies 'intelligently to inform their teaching; it is the teacher who as a consequence nurtures reflexive, resilient and autonomous learners' (Spendlove 2009, p4). This is a philosophy I use within my own ideology. As teachers, it is our duty to consistently

assess the progression of our students to ensure they succeed and flourish as individual learners to the best of their ability.

Word Count: 1,096

References

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Image 2.1 - Bates, Harriet, 2016. *Stage Directions: Y7 Introduction to Drama*. [PPT]. *Stage Directions*. Y7 Introduction to Drama Module. Birmingham City University. Drama. 3/11/16.

Image 3.1 - Bates, Harriet, 2016. *Stage Directions: Y7 Introduction to Drama*. [PPT]. *Stage Directions*. Y7 Introduction to Drama Module. Birmingham City University. Drama. 3/11/16.

Image 4.1 - Bates, Harriet, 2016. *Tableaux: Y7 Introduction to Drama*. [PPT]. *Tableaux*. Y7 Introduction to Drama Module. Birmingham City University. Drama. 17/11/16.

Image 5.1 - Bates, Harriet, 2016. *Tableaux: Y7 Introduction to Drama*. [PPT]. *Tableaux*. Y7 Introduction to Drama Module. Birmingham City University. Drama. 17/11/16.

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