ASSESSMENT IN DRAMA EDUCATION

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Drama education connects to the human experience, engages learners in imaginative and aesthetic growth, accesses technical skills and allows for vocationally orientated experiences. Learning in drama is additionally creative and dynamic, and assessment tasks that are also appropriately creative and dynamic can be used to gauge dramatic responses upon the learning trajectory. Drama assessment most commonly takes place in a schooling context, but it is also a regular feature of drama in higher and further education and is occasionally present in co-curricular drama learning. In a schooling context, the inclusion of drama in curricula must conform to curriculum policies and procedures, including those related to assessment and certification. It is arguable that ongoing and regular assessments are critical components of the drama learning. Formative and summative assessment in drama takes many forms, including creative endeavours, performance events and analysis tasks. This chapter contends that it is possible to assess drama learning with a high degree of integrity and further argues that drama assessment should reflect the multifaceted nature of the art form and of the learning processes involved. This chapter draws on a wide range of literature both in and outside of drama education to plot some opportunities and challenges that drama assessment presents. Possible solutions to the challenges of drama assessment are discussed, as are the limitations of assessment in creative and aesthetically charged fields.

Drama learning is often characterised as having the key qualities of artistic engagement and employment of the aesthetic senses through the creation, performance and analysis of the art form. Drama education research offers a widespread acknowledgement of the importance of aesthetic learning (Bolton, 1984; Abbs, 1989, 1993; Lavery, 1992; McLean, 1996; Greenwood, 2011; Bird & Sinclair, 2019). In this context, it must also be noted that drama often coexists with other art forms under umbrella curriculums in arts. The assessment processes in dance, music, visual art, media and other art forms have complementary qualities; for example, in these subjects, students are required to produce, present and analyse art as essential components of the learning. There are lessons to be learned from these complementary fields, which will be discussed later in the chapter.
Why assess in drama?

As a researcher in arts assessment, I am most commonly asked to justify why artistic work should be assessed. The assessment of artistic work can be controversial in itself, considering the range of challenges (Jacobs, 2016), some of which will be discussed in this chapter. Despite these complexities, I buy into assessment as being a necessary and valuable component of drama learning, particularly within the context of schooling. Assessment is a kind of judgement or evaluation, and the arts are judged all the time, by audiences, curators, producers or people in powerful positions such as funding bodies. Rightly or wrongly, judgement is applied to art, so in a learning context it is vital that judgement takes place in a manner that is fair, equitable, transparent and supportive.

Landy (2005) asserts that assessment in drama has two purposes: first, to determine student readiness for certain dramatic tasks; and, second, to gauge student competency in drama. It would be fair to say that most students do not engage in the study of drama purely for the purposes of engaging in assessment. However, most have chosen to study drama with an interest in performance or creative work. They simply love to “do” (Lovesy, 2002, p. 85). Additionally, drama students are generally able to perceive the broader aims of performance assessment and can see the relationship between performance tasks and their broader lives, as shown in studies by Jacobs (2017), Hatton (2004) and Smigiel and Barrett (2005). These studies attest to students being able to acutely perceive the bigger picture of the purpose of drama education through engaging in assessment.

Pragmatically, assessment in drama is both achievable and necessary to establish the credibility of drama as a subject and to provide systems for identifying student achievement within the formal school curricula. Kleiman (2005) reminds us that the assessment process is a product of the drama education environment. Assessment tasks allow students to consolidate what they have learned. Performance assessment tasks in particular give students opportunities to display their achievements publicly, and they are often proud to do so.

Qualities of drama assessment

In drama, formative and summative assessment takes place through a range of assessable instruments that include, but are not limited to, individual and group performances, journals and logbooks, essays, research assignments, design portfolios (e.g., costume, set or lighting design), director folios, script development, improvisation tasks, video production, work created as part of process dramas, self-reflection, theatre reviews and interviews. Sadler (2013) states that assessment in the arts frequently includes divergent tasks, which are those where “no uniquely correct response exists” (p. 55). Sadler specifically refers to the complexity, stating that creative performance and work require high levels of technical or procedural skill, high levels of intellectualisation, cognitive activity or aesthetic appreciation; or all of these. A wide range of responses to a particular task are also plausible.

Drama creation and performance involve creative processes which are multifaceted with many interlocking variables (Thomas & Millard, 2006), emphasising originality, creativity and innovation. In order to create or present quality drama, students are required not only to interpret theatrical traditions, but also to synthesise their own ideas with theatrical conventions, while showcasing their performance skill; they are obliged to do all these things while accessing the aesthetic as appropriate to the task. Performers make decisions each second as they engage simultaneously in performance and reflection (Baptiste, 2008). Drama assessment involves the demonstration of skills and craftsmanship and requires students to create
original work that will “energise us with some previously unseen thing” (Kleiman, 2005, p. 1). Drama assessment requires students to demonstrate – and assessors to evaluate – not only what students know, but also what they can do (Bergen, 1993).

The pursuit of the purposes of drama should always be paramount in the design of effective assessment instruments. Among other purposes, drama aims to connect to the human experience, to facilitate imaginative, aesthetic and creative growth, to access technical drama skills and to engage students in vocationally orientated experiences. Attributes such as flair, imagination and originality, as appropriate to the style concerned, feature strongly in assessment criteria.

Challenges of drama assessment

As mentioned previously, the simple existence of assessment in drama causes tension for some. It can be argued that the outcome of formal and widespread assessment of artistic creations can result in a stifling of individual expression, imagination, creativity and originality, while not allowing for the fresh pursuit of ideas (Hanley, 2003). A wide range of responses are plausible or even encouraged given a particular task. The promotion of innovation, experimental ideas and autonomy can create incomparable measures of success. MacGregor, Lemerise, Potts and Roberts (1994) explain that arts assessment presents a tension between the demonstration of skill mastery and the embrace of autonomy and incomparability. When encouraging students to embrace this autonomy, innovation and independent thought, drama educators may be encouraging students to experiment to the point of failure, which runs against traditional educational tropes that value achievement, competitive thinking and success. On top of this, Oreck, Owen and Baum (2004) add that performance assessment presents unique challenges, as the processes used are highly dependent on a wide range of interrelated contributions, such as the variations between performance sites, requirements for ensemble or group work, access to technical equipment and the composition and reactions of any audience that might be in attendance.

Assessment of artistic work presents challenges for educational administrators more accustomed to high stakes or scientifically rigorous styles of measurement that are easily subjected to testing. Drama assessment tasks with an aesthetic dimension require assessors to make personal responses to the student’s product, which can be unfamiliar to those more accustomed to assessment tasks with previously defined answers. Traditional assessment methods (such as multiple-choice tests, short or long essay questions) are often noted for their ability to ensure reliability and fairness, but these assessment methods cannot give whole picture of a student’s learning and potential for growth. Traditional testing methods have reductive tendencies, as they ask students to show evidence of predetermined knowledge. Haynes (2008) and Ross (1993) also describe traditional assessment as being objectivity-focused, as assessors are expected to discard their own feelings in favour of strictly set criteria in which interpretations are not required. Drama assessment, however, has a duality of objective and subjective judgement in play. This duality is not unique to drama, but it adds complexity to the assessor’s role, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

The relationship between educator and student has an interesting and somewhat unique dynamic in drama. Bird (2006) describes this teacher-student relationship as multifaceted and periodically “intense” (p. 80). At times, drama educators direct their students; at times, they actively assist in the creative process; and at other times, they are required to challenge the artistic content of a student’s creative work. Ultimately, unless an external assessor is present, the drama educator must assess the artistic product which they have overseen or even helped develop.
Performance tasks can be highly exposing for students and the presence of the audience adds complexity to the assessment environment. A student completing a performance task is somewhat of a master of two servants, as they aim to concurrently entertain their audience while impressing the assessor according to the set criteria. The simple existence of that criterion is similarly controversial. While well-designed assessment criteria can help to inform students of the expectations before them (Stemler, 2004; Baptiste, 2008), criterion referencing, by its nature, is predicated on the known. Creativity researchers Amabile (1996) and Sternberg (1988) argue that any products derived from a known formula or predetermined set of instructions can never be considered creative. Kleiman (2005) similarly argues that a criterion-referenced framework is a “closed system” that perpetuates non-creative outcomes (p. 21).

Finally, while this chapter ultimately advocates for drama assessment, it also acknowledges another issue, that assessment systems were created by powerful people with majoritarian values. Assessment systems have long devalued types of knowledges and ways of working, and to this, drama education is not immune. As a researcher of colour, I apply a decolonising lens to much of my writing, and this chapter contains a section discussing the need to decolonise assessment practices. While not explicitly addressed, this chapter also acknowledges that assessment exacerbates inequalities such as gender, class or sexual inequalities, ableism, geographic disadvantage and other disparities, as well as the intersectional realities that are often not discussed in an assessment context.

The following section addresses all of these challenges, while acknowledging that complexity and nuance are among the hallmarks of a robust artistic field. Easy solutions to the challenges of drama assessment are not always achievable or desirable.

**Addressing the challenges and complexities**

*Making the incomparable comparable*

Individual responses lie at the heart of artistic creation. Individuals craft their assessment responses as part of a student-centred approach to assessment, in which innovation, experimental ideas and autonomy are encouraged to create ‘good’ art. Rather than creating incomparable measures of success, there is a great deal of literature that attests that creative work can be assessed with a high degree of integrity (Willoughby et al., 1995; Colwell, 2003; de la Harpe et al., 2009; Fleming, 2012; Jacobs, 2018). Fowler (1996) goes so far as to celebrate the fact that arts education develops non-measurable accomplishments. Further to this, Taylor (2006) is critical of drama educators that become overly concerned with technical skills, due to the outcomes orientation of the education system. Obsession with technical skill detracts from the spirit of creative assessment, which is designed to push students to create new and unseen ideas, without fear of technical failure. Treffinger (2009) encourages arts educators to abandon attempts to make the assessment of creative products “easy” (p. 246) as this reduces the pool of ideas that spring forth as a result. It is preferable to maintain the complexities of creative assessment tasks, as assessment helps to heighten awareness of the challenges of assessing creative work, thereby bringing about greater transparency (Hyde, 2013).

**Embracing failure**

Dewett (2007) and Smith and Henriksen (2016) argue that anyone who succeeds creatively must be willing to try and fail.
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To fail in creative processes is essential, whether in iterations of failure that lead toward ultimate success; or reactions on failure where struggling with uncertainty leads to contemplation and an ability to manage ambiguity.

(Smith & Henriksen, p. 6)

In fact, public discourse on creative education is littered with quotes, memes, writings and TED-talk-style advice that tells us being prepared to fail is critical for creative flourishing.

Creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes. Art is knowing which ones to keep.

(Adams, 2015)

An essential aspect of creativity is not being afraid to fail. (attributed to American scientist Edwin Land)

If you’re not prepared to be wrong, you’ll never come up with anything original.

(Robinson, 2006)

While appealing to the aspirational educator hoping to buck their antiquated education systems, these quotes offer cold comfort to the student trapped in a high-stakes testing regime in which their futures can be shaped by the results and grades they achieve. While system reform is ultimately the goal of most drama educators, it is possible that a hybrid system can be created, in which risk and failure are rewarded as successes.

To begin, drama educators should normalise risk, mistakes and failure as part of the learning environment. Reading small texts, such as The Beautiful Oops! (Saltzberg, 2010), or doing deconstructions of risk outside of the drama context can help deepen students’ metaunderstanding of the need to risk and fail. The maintenance of resilience and a growth mindset in students, as well as the development of a comfort with ambiguity and the ability to learn through discomfort, can be facilitated using skilful use of formative assessment strategies. These pedagogies are complementary to drama processes. Drama educators often push students to play, improvise and playbuild, sometimes with even the most terrible ideas. They encourage experimentation without the risk of judgement, in the hope that students will produce new art. Additional components of active reflection can be assessed as part of the learning, as is commonly done with process diaries or logbooks. Reflexivity may have a key role to play in the criteria for the final product being assessed, so that a performance or artistic product may contain elements of failure, but the thinking that guided the student towards stronger dramatic skills and knowledge can be rewarded.

Subjective judgements on creative process and product

Subjective judgements are always present in the assessment process for tasks that assess creative and aesthetic process or products. Drama education is not the only educational site of subjectivity. Writing about oral presentations, Hutchison (2019) describes tasks as “highly subjective entities” (p. 89) and goes on to describe connection with the audience as an essential component of success (also discussed later in this chapter). Leach, Neutze and Zepke (2015) argue that assessors are consciously and unconsciously biased by their own values, preferences and dispositions. However, there is a pervasive assessment myth that subjective judgements are somehow contra to the principles of ‘good’ assessment practice (McMillan, 2000; Brookhart, 2011; Hyde, 2013). ‘Good assessment’ is fair and ethical, uses multiple
methods, is valid and feasible and enhances instruction. Understanding subjective judgments can achieve all of these hallmarks of quality assessment practice. In fact, O’Toole et al. (2009) remind us that “Knowledge and learning are of course never objective nor value-neutral” (p. 108), and therefore objectivity-focused assessment practice can also be viewed with a critical eye.

Tomlinson (2001) argues for a healthy balance between subjective and objective judgments in order to create informed judgements on performance assessment that provide the most “individually sensitive, accurate and comprehensive evidence” (p. 15) of student learning. Misson (1996) goes so far as to identify drama as a site for the construction of subjectivity, which he argues operates at the nexus of intelligence and emotion because “Thought is charged with feeling, while feeling is refined and strengthened by thought” (p. 11). In this respect, it has long been argued that drama teaches empathy (Trinder 1977; Holland 2009; Grove O’Grady, 2020). Similarly, Bolton (1984) describes drama as a process of ‘unselfing’, which makes subjective and alternative responses a valid part of the dramatic response. Additionally, it should be possible to separate subjective judgments of creativity from judgments of technical goodness and from judgments of aesthetic appeal. Despite having naturally subjective reactions from an assessor, they can still assess technical achievements transparently. In this respect, personal responses from both the assessor and the student can widen the possibilities for interpretation. Rather than command that assessors discard these personal responses, it is preferable for students to be taught to use individuals’ insights to reflect upon and, if necessary, make adjustments to their performances. Students should be encouraged to seek feedback and apply their own artistic decisions to their work. Both drama students and drama educators should be aware that subjective responses are natural, as they are rooted in “culturally authorised criteria” (Ross, 1993, p. 164) that bring about judgement on the level of achievement. However, the assessor’s judgement is recorded in quantifiable terms such as grades or marks; therefore, the student naturally develops a heightened awareness of the supremacy of the assessor’s responses in the high-stakes assessment environment.

When assessing creative work in drama, the assessor makes cognitive links between student choices based on the assessment criteria, balancing their judgements with their own implicit criteria, which is necessarily based on their personal experiences (Baptiste, 2008). While an audience member is permitted to make purely subjective judgements, the assessor makes informed judgements, which result in marks or grades being recorded. Drama educators develop expertise in assessing the outcome of the creative process or the manifestation of the individual aesthetic experience. The drama work is therefore viewed from a number of perspectives, and informed judgements are made by the assessor based on set criteria and personal discretionary judgements in relation to the quality of what is produced.

Complex role of the assessor

Dunn (2005) argues that drama is unique in that much of the work is both ephemeral and fragile in nature. The ability of the assessor to capture and report their thoughts on the quality of work as it occurs is vital to the integrity of the assessment process. Kempe (2015) believes that the success of student-devised work relies on the educator developing independence in their students so they are able to collaborate with each other in performance-making, without direct leadership from that educator. Warren (2003) adds that it is the place of the drama educator to structure independent work but then intervene, asking “good and significant questions” (p. 33). The drama educator designs the task like a curator who designates artistic parameters. They often advise the drama student during the development
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process, but Harris (2008) adds that care should be taken to ensure the work is not unduly a product of the educator’s influence, and that student ingenuity emerges, rather than just ideas and practices developed under guidance. Treffinger et al. (2015) argue that, if creativity is to develop, it is essential that educators create an environment in which students feel safe and are encouraged to express their ideas. The learning environment should be open, value new and different ideas, allow playfulness and humour, offer challenge, encourage involvement, build trust, provide both idea time and idea support and promote freedom and risk-taking.

During the assessment process, the drama educator moves from being the curator and guide to being the critic, as they are required to assess the student drama creations and arrive at a grade or result which quantifies the student’s achievement. This puts them in a precarious position. Drama education is subject to the hidden curriculum in which implicit and informal aspects of the curriculum are discovered through engaging in the learning environment. Like all environments, drama educators have expectations that are explicitly stated and other tacit messages about what learning will be rewarded. Drama assessment also requires both the student and the educator to be open to learning possibilities that are outside of the educator’s expectations. Writing from the professional world of the arts, Scott-Murphy (2004) argues that there are numerous examples of artists having been successful in gaining tender or selection when working outside the scope of the original brief. In an educational context, working outside the brief is referred to as providing a divergent response, which is also encouraged in drama learning.

Presence of the audience

When engaging in performance tasks, drama students learn numerous drama conventions, including that of the relationship between the performer and the audience. The presence of an audience makes the drama assessment process public, somewhat exposing for those being assessed and authentic. A particular power relationship between the actor and audience is present during an assessed performance. The drama student is required to dictate the terms of the performance to the audience. The drama educator (who may also be in the role of the assessor) maintains some degree of control over the performance event and performance environment, particularly in a school environment. Although the drama student maintains a degree of autonomy over the terms of the performance, the drama educator has prescribed the boundaries within which the students must work, by, for example, setting the theatrical style and the subject matter that can be dealt with. Additionally, the drama educator may halt a performance which is deemed inappropriate or unsafe.

During a performance assessment, students have a unique relationship with their audience, and student performers are aware of their dual purpose when they are performing for the purpose of assessment. Students aim to achieve favourable results for their assessment, but also to impress their audience with a strong performance. The concept of authentic assessment can be found within drama performance assessment tasks. Authentic assessment is characterised as having conditions that mirror the “real world” (Frey, 2012, p. 1) such that discipline-specific cognitive processes are developed and a product is created that has value inside and outside of the school setting (Palm, 2008). The presence of the audience is one of the factors that provide the conditions for drama performance assessment to be considered authentic. The audience also provides dual scrutiny to the performance. Students receive feedback from the teacher-assessor and from their audience of peers. Feedback from the audience is immediate and subsequent, consisting of emotional or affective responses. Audience members also offer comments or critiques to student actors after their performances,
reinforcing the notion that art is viewed from multiple perspectives. Interaction with the audience and audience engagement or connection are often criteria on which student performers are judged, reinforcing the authentic nature of performance tasks.

**Criterion-referenced assessment for performance**

Criterion-referenced assessment (interchangeable terms for this type of assessment include the use of a *rubric, marking criteria, marking and standards criteria or grading criteria*) is now synonymous with quality assessment practice and is widely used in most disciplines. The benefits are well known; well-designed assessment criteria can help to inform students of the expectations before them. Criteria enable students to prepare for assessments, engage with judgements and appeal against results. Criteria should be stated explicitly; the attributes for each performance criterion should be clear and the attributes that are differentiated from one level to the next need to be set out and applied appropriately. The continuum of performance levels should assist students to engage in a critique of their own skills, while also increasing their knowledge and assessing their personal growth (Arter & McTighe, 2001; Lindström, 2006; Hyde, 2013; Goodrich, 2015). However, the complexities mentioned earlier require a robust examination of the methods used to develop and apply criteria to the creative work of students.

Just as for any other subject, it is imperative that learning and assessment in drama are aligned. Boyle (2003) declares that the first step in assessing higher-order thinking in drama is to ensure that the curriculum (what is taught), pedagogy (how it is taught) and assessment (how the content is assessed) are in alignment. When these things are aligned, arts assessment is a judgement of the outcome of artistic styles of learning, discovery and creativity (Sadler, 2009) rather than a confinement of students into responses that are predictable and iterative (Ross, 1994).

When considering drama assessment, it is useful to explore assessment research from other arts disciplines such as music and dance, as they too manage similar tensions in the assessment of creative work. Music researchers Dixon (2000) and Asmus (1999) are critical of assessment criteria that lack detail when describing the elements of artistic accomplishment that are valued. Ross (1994) and Gordon (2004) are also critical of assessment criteria that are heavy in artistic language and jargon that is not accessible to the learner. It can be difficult to place this practitioner wisdom in a grid that is meaningful for students. As an example, Gordon explains the challenge he faces when dealing with responses that work beyond the brief and contain what he explains as the wow factor. The wow factor is “an elegance, which will arrest and satisfy … beyond the norm demonstrating innovation, ingenuity, independent thought and divergent thinking” (Gordon, p. 62). Dixon (2000) also calls for performance assessment criteria to recognise stage presence, which can be an intangible mixture of charisma, talent and ego. Dixon suggests that passion, soul and spirit are often omitted as criteria within drama assessment, yet these qualities lie at the heart of a great performance. The educator negotiates such challenges in the drama assessment process and identifies skills and qualities that they themselves may not have anticipated.

Clark (2002) adds that the provision of well-constructed assessment criteria provides a way for student performances to be evaluated easily and equitably, without compromising on the divergent qualities of individual creative processes that arise in student responses to drama assessment tasks. Ross (1994) suggests that the key qualities of assessment criteria should address the links between generation, realisation and response in drama. The work should also be grounded in content knowledge. The student needs to apply content
knowledge with creative skills to address the task (Pritchard, 2004). Divergent responses are permissible and assessable and encouraged in the criteria for success.

As with all styles of assessment, validity and transparency of criteria are important to the design of fair assessment. Thus, assessment processes should not be shrouded in mystery (Biggs & Tang, 2011). The “knowing it when they find it” approach to assessment (Gordon, 2004, p. 62) is no longer acceptable in contemporary education. To aid transparency, there have been further developments in the language used for drama assessment criteria. It is now, for example, acceptable to use simpler, less descriptive grids, less formal language or holistic criteria (Sadler, 2009) while still communicating expectations using acceptable formal terminologies. A study by Wojtas (1998, in Weaver 2006, p. 381) claimed that students were more likely to improve their work if they understood their assessment criteria. In a drama context, misunderstandings of the criteria can manifest in students either being unwilling to develop their drama skills or repeating past shortcomings without improvement or progress.

Decolonising drama assessment

Ngarla (Rosalie) Kunoth-Monks, an Arrernte Anmatjere woman, First Nations Elder, actor and activist, delivered an impassioned statement on national Australian television, declaring

*I am the result of the pressure of somebody putting another culture into this cultured being… I am not the problem.*

Colonised education practices see colonised people as the problem. In an assessment context, ‘achievement gaps’ are commonly discussed with regard to race, as well as gender, class, disability and other areas of marginalisation. The phrasing of such terms leads us to believe that something is wrong with the student, rather than with the system that is assessing them or the systems that created the inequality in the first place. With regard to race, gaps exist as a result of the legacy of colonisation, the history of dispossession and slavery, intergenerational trauma, systemic inequality, ongoing racism and marginalisation, rising white supremacy and a system designed to perpetuate racial hierarchies. Ibram X. Kendi (2016) reminds us that there is no achievement gap. Rather there is an opportunity gap in which different environments cause different kinds of achievement rather than different levels of achievement. Eizadirad (2019), like Kendi, discusses inequality of opportunity and the need to assess students in local communities using an ecological place-based approach that employs themes that are also commonly found in drama learning: love, cooperation, reciprocity and sacrifice. These components cannot be measured quantitatively, but, rather, qualitatively over time through students’ thoughts, words and actions. Drama educators are uniquely placed to lead these conversations. Our assessment tasks are aesthetically charged, multi-modal sites of cultural transmission, focussed on the students’ originality, life experience and creation. But many shifts are required for us to lead, including becoming activists outside of our own artistry and centring the perspectives of non-white and Global South educators and researchers to lead these conversations and shifts.

Conversations around decolonising in the arts can be fraught. Rhetorically, the arts world has declared their core values to include empathy, tolerance, human connection and the pursuit of a more just and fair world. Critiquing this rhetoric can be seen as a betrayal of one’s fellow arts advocates or a disloyalty to the project of promoting the benefits of arts education at all times and in all spaces. In reality, Pearce (2012) argues that arts education serves to institute whiteness as an unquestioned norm that marginalises and excludes various
voices, cultural practices and perspectives. The problem of a colonised arts curriculum and practice is historically rooted. Crilly, Panesar and Suka-Bill (2020) explain that the modern conception of ‘the arts’ was conceived within a closely protected Eurocentric context in the Enlightenment era and beyond. They remind us that it was also during the Enlightenment period that contemporary conceptions of race, including the concept of racial ordering, were created and used as the main justification for the colonial project. European civilisation was literally painted as the “epitome of human cultural evolution” (Herman & Kraehe, 2018, p. 210), and the idea of who is recognised as an artist continues to shape the way arts education functions today.

When discussing ways to decolonise assessment in the arts, the focus is often around content. For example, the solution often suggested is to diversify the reading list by studying culturally and geographically diverse writers, histories, performances and texts. While diverse content is important, it is more effective to use critical race theory (CRT) as an analytical framework to move beyond content to deconstruct current practices and examine the covert and institutionalised methods of whiteness in education. Simply changing a text list only serves to embed those texts into racist and colonised systems. The effect is that some students can be marginalised inside the system while studying their own history or text from their heritage. This is why the assessment conversation must be had through the lens of CRT, to shift towards alternative models of assessment and systemic change. As South African writer Candace Smith (2020) declares in her thesis, not only content but also assessment practices should be changed in the decolonial sense.

We can learn much from writers outside of drama education who have designed and trialled models of assessment that prioritise equity, restoration and justice. Drawing from the world of visual arts, Mbembe (2016) suggests implementing assessment that facilitates more learner-centred approaches and a more collaborative atmosphere in the arts classroom, assessment that departs from the idea of the artist as lone creative genius, working silently and individually under the eye of the educator. While drama is arguably more collaborative than visual arts, group work is still looked upon as a liability by many students, parents, community members and even educators in Western education systems, and we are far from creating communities of artists that are more akin to indigenous ways of working. “Decolonizing Art, Education and Research in the VIVA Project” by Reinsborough and Barndt (2010) from Mexico favoured an inside-out approach which created opportunities for the reflection and exchange of information between the learner and the broader community. The student–centred approach focuses on the empowering of learners by including them in problem-solving and decision-making in regard to teaching and learning and links to the concept of relevance. Finally, one of the underpinning philosophies of many assessment approaches that aim to decolonise is the emphasis on students using their own background and heritage as a creative springboard in order to create new work.

Limitations of drama assessment

Assessment in drama allows students to work within a creative frame or an artistic brief. At best, drama assessment tasks provide enabling constraints that allow students opportunities to engage in drama in new, exciting and creative ways. Assessment tasks should be a jumping-off point or a blueprint of ideas through which the student would hone their ideas, skills, knowledge and understandings of drama. However, as an assessment researcher, I am also careful not to overestimate the role of assessment in drama learning. Assessment is a form of response. Assessment samples demonstrations of learning; it is not learning itself. Assessment
tasks alone cannot lead students to be creative, imaginative or artistically engaged. For creativity to occur, a learning environment must be embedded with creative philosophies and practices that allow for the pursuit of meaningful, new forms. This chapter notes that it is a combination of curriculum, the class and school culture, selected educational experiences and subsequent assessment processes which create the conditions that allow creativity to thrive.

Like all assessment regimes, drama students can learn what Orrell (2005) calls “the rules of the game”, in which students find ways to advantage themselves in the system. Though the tasks may be authentic and reflective of the global aims of drama education, drama assessment still operates within a system that can be manipulated for gain. Orrell’s use of the metaphor of a ‘game’ has some negative connotations. This chapter does not mean to suggest that drama students use underhanded methods to discover a secret code that is shielded by the educator. Rather, students who find ways to gain advantage in assessment are showing maturity in the way they are responding to the task. One of drama’s aims must certainly be to develop students’ awareness of the ways in which the outside world will interpret their artistic creations. Similarly, in life we learn the rules of every game, be it social, economic, ecological or personal, so that we might survive, or even thrive and flourish.

**Conclusion**

This chapter aimed to provide an overview of some pertinent issues in drama assessment. Using a range of literature from drama education and beyond, it aimed to discuss the challenges associated with drama assessment, but also some remedies to those challenges. Further, it sought to acknowledge the opportunities that drama assessment provides for drama learning. Academic work is notoriously associated with rational and quantifiable modes of thinking. Therefore, drama assessment can be challenging to those outside the field. This is why we must work with extra fervour to create processes that are transparent and able to be understood by drama and non-drama practitioners alike. Decrying that no one understands what we do or that we are misunderstood will not cut it in a world where artistry must become more, not less, accessible. The challenge posed by drama assessment to traditional learning and assessment paradigms is also important because it broadens the educational community’s understanding of the nature of learning. Discussing the merits of drama assessment tasks allows for the rigour and complexities of the tasks to become visible to those outside of artistic fields.

Drama educators and students do not engage in drama assessment to have a complete and full understanding of all its nuances. They engage in drama and performance to experience the joy of creative expression and artistic creation, to play pretend in a range of roles and to build a more comprehensive understanding of the human experience through the lens of theatre. Drama education is intricate, and, when the dimension of assessment is included, it becomes rich with tensions and challenges. To reflect the creativity within the field itself, it is imperative that researchers and practitioners use inventive and imaginative thinking to find solutions to these challenges. Some of the joys of drama learning is its subtlety, its ambiguousness and its lack of definitive black and white answers in a world full of shades of grey. Aestheticism often raises more questions than it answers; this, in turn, allows educators and learners to constantly philosophise, theorise and question their understandings. Like aestheticism itself, the tensions raised in this chapter require deep thinking and intense discussion, and definitive answers may not be found. These subtleties add to the richness of drama assessment, a space in which educators and students alike take risks, grow, fail and succeed, often simultaneously.
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