

Seaside Memories

Evaluation Report

Executive Summary

Seaside Memories takes a fresh and highly inventive approach to exploring local heritage with young people. Using Lowestoft as its focus, it looks at how our ideas of seaside holiday fun have changed over the past two hundred years. Using film and performance, the team explored how entertainment, beach fashion and seafront architecture has evolved from the pre-Victorian era to the present day.

The film was made by 20 young people from Benjamin Britten High and Warren School, helped by Media Projects East, Cantor's International Theatre School, the Shaw Trust and a team of local historians. The team of young people gained accredited skills in drama, animation, film making and research techniques.

In making the film, they time-travelled into old postcards, then talked to fishermen, holiday makers and youngsters from a century ago. They created an end of the pier show in the tradition of Pierrot mime. They animated some of the more exotic acts that have passed in and out of vogue, including lion taming, snake charming, boxing and dance. They interviewed historians on many fascinating subjects, such as how to use a Victorian bathing machine and where to book a Charabanc holiday. Kenny Cantor offered them glimpses of his rich and varied career in show business and talked about the colourful characters he has met.

The team then created a web site design brief, which they submitted to professional design company, Designory. Designory then added the technical wizardry needed to bring the team's vision to life, and build their work into an engaging and accessible web based resource for young and old alike.

The Aims of the Project

The idea for the project grew out of the extraordinary success of "Mardling From Coast to Broad". This previously Young Roots funded project established a dynamic model for engaging young people in their local heritage via moving image arts. It was a model we were keen to explore further and did so in the following ways:

The theme of seaside entertainment history was prompted by the fact we had recently established links with youth groups in Lowestoft, and they had expressed a keen interest in its tourism history. We wanted to be sure we were taking the right approach, so we consulted pupils from Warren School in Lowestoft. They prepared a radio style feature on the subject, interviewing their peers on the subject of seaside entertainment and why they wanted to explore its history.

The next step involved identifying a youth organisation which could help us recruit the most deserving participants. Media Projects East had run a video based training project with The Shaw Trust, so they seemed the natural choice. Through their many years of delivering career based training to disabled and disadvantaged young adults, they have established an excellent relationship with local schools and youth organisations. They agreed to provide three services: they recruited the young people, provided a workshop base, and delivered accredited training through the National Open College Network.

The third part of the equation was finding heritage organisations which could support the youth led research. The obvious choice was Lowestoft Heritage Workshop Centre, whose local historians John Stannard and Terry Lynes together hold an encyclopaedic knowledge of Lowestoft's history, particularly in relation to its role as a tourist destination.

We also approached Neil Storey, who had provided invaluable support in identifying the supernatural folklore of Norfolk for the Mardling project. He agreed to present an illustrated lecture on the history of end of the pier style entertainment, from the 1800s to the 1930s. He also helped inspire the young teams as they devised their own homage to the entertainers of the past, by exploring the world of Pierrot mime.

Finally, we invited Cantor's Theatre School to be involved. Caron Cantor has a lifetime of experience in delivering theatre skills workshops with young people, including those with special educational needs. She took a key role in helping the teams to develop their expressive arts skills, including song, mime, dance and role play. Her partner Kenny Cantor was interviewed by the team about his lifetime of experience as an end of the pier entertainer. He also prepared a slide show about some of the most famous seaside acts of the twentieth century.

Media Projects East provided the film and animation training the teams needed to interpret their subject via documentary work, reminiscence, and animation. The young people also used these skills to record their drama work for the camera, so it could be integrated into the final film. They learned how to place themselves as actors in a range of eras and theatrical situations via blue screen based post production.

Delivering the Project

The workshop activities were planned and scheduled to offer a wide range of approaches to the research and interpretive stages of the project. We ran two parallel workshop series. The first was for a group of young people with special educational needs, based at the Warren School. The second was a group of young women in their mid teens who were either experiencing difficulties with mainstream education or were undertaking a media studies GCSE. We arranged through their course tutor to have their work accredited as part of their GCSE studies, as well as through NOCN.

Each workshop module followed the same pathway through the project. They each contained 3 days of history research, 2 days of animation, 3 days of live action drama work, 1 rehearsal day and 2 days of accreditation based work followed by the launch event.

Warren School Team Schedule

16th Sept: History 1: The Pierrots and the Early Entertainers
(with Neil Storey)
Drama Workshop: Mime
(with Martin Sercombe and Neil Storey)
23rd Sept: Animation 1: Cut Out styles
(with Martin Sercombe)
30th Sept: History 2: Twentieth Century Entertainers
(with Kenny Cantor)
Drama Workshop with Caron Cantor
7th Oct: Live Action 1: Seaside Sketches
(with Caron Cantor and Martin Sercombe)
14th Oct: History 3: Exploring Lowestoft's Seafront History
(with John Stannard and Terry Lynes)
21st Oct: Animation 2: Plasticine animations inspired by previous research
(with Martin Sercombe)
4th Nov: Live Action 2: Talking Postcards Drama Workshop
(with Neil Storey and Martin Sercombe)
11th Nov: Animation 3: Plasticine animation sketches
(with Martin Sercombe)
18th Nov: Rehearsal for launch event with both teams
25th Nov: Accreditation work (with Bev Patnell and Mike Gillon)
2nd Dec: Accreditation work (with Bev Patnell and Mike Gillon)
4th Dec at 2 pm: Premiere at The Seagull Theatre
Press Interviews and Photo Calls

The NOCN Accreditation

Developing Technical Skills for Performance in the Arts is an NOCN Level 1 Step Up unit. It covers the following learning outcomes:

Learning Outcome 1: Demonstrate an understanding of health and safety measures relating to performance.

1.1 Formally agree to health and safety rules for performance environment.
Complete a Risk Assessment.

Learning Outcome 2: Contribute to the process of creating a performance (drama, music, and dance).

2.1 Contribute ideas to planning a short performance
2.2 Work supportively with others
2.3 Identify own role and responsibilities

2.4 Storyboard a performance

Learning Outcome 3 – Develop technical skills required for performance through rehearsal.

- 3.1 Apply basic skills appropriate to the performance
- 3.2 Develop basic skills through practice to improve own practice
- 3.3 Identify skills developed and comment on progress
- 3.4 Respond positively to feedback

Learning Outcome 4 – Contribute to skills in performance

- 4.1 Apply skills in performance.
- 4.2 Perform with confidence.
- 4.3 Contribute to performance reliably and responsibly.

Learning Outcome 5 – Reflect on own work.

- 5.1 Comment on own performance.
- 5.2 Identify areas for development in performance in the light of feedback

The young people learned many more skills than could be formally assessed within the framework of NOCN accreditation. However, this qualification was seen to be the best fit of those which could be readily delivered by Shaw Trust staff within the contact time available.

The Response of the Young People

Warren School provided two or more support teachers for every session. Their assistance was crucial in providing differentiated learning for each of the students, and also in helping teachers from outside school to establish a quick and easy rapport.

The support teachers also used the sessions as in service training, and have taken many of the techniques back to the classroom for further development. Most importantly, they have recognised the enormous educational value of media based projects such as these. The school is currently setting up a video and music production suite, with advice from our company. This will allow them to capitalise fully on the new skills learned by students and teachers alike, and initiate a range of follow up projects.

Another benefit of working with the classroom teachers is the deeper perspective they brought to the assessment of each student's learning journey. They were able to observe the broad cross curricular benefits of the students' increase in confidence, communication skills and creativity. One teacher remarked "The team spend all week at school talking to their friends about the work they are doing here. It's amazing the positive impact it is having on their school work."

The most refreshing aspect of working with this group was the sheer enthusiasm they brought to each new assignment. The fact that some had speech impairments or other special educational needs simply led them to discover alternative ways of expressing their ideas, through mime, writing, drawing or animation. The creative energy generated by the group is clearly visible in the drama and animation sequences they created for the film. It demonstrates the power of democratic peer-based learning, where students, film makers, drama teachers and historians can all learn from each other, sharing their particular skills and creativity.

The team from Benjamin Britten High came to the project for a variety of reasons. Some had expressed a wish to follow a career in photography or the media. Others had been invited by their teachers because of pastoral or educational difficulties they were experiencing at school. We found that the level of interest and commitment fluctuated wildly with this group. In general, this team was immediately enthused by the performance and drama work and art based activities. Most proved to be naturals at improvisation, devising imaginative performance sequences and writing original music for the film.

The team struggled at times to engage with the research, pre-production planning and written aspects of the work. In saying this, it must be added that the project placed very high demands on the young people and challenged them on many different levels. They needed an ability to assimilate historical information and interpret it in engaging and creative ways. The project demanded good team work negotiating skills in planning each new film sequence. It required a rapid understanding of film and theatre language in order to work effectively within the media. Bearing all this in mind, much of the work which they eventually completed would be acceptable as a degree level assignment!

The Impact on Our Company

The models of working suggested by this project will be developed further in future work. We are currently approaching heritage organisations throughout the Eastern Region inviting them to partner in similar projects.

We are planning a research project titled **Stories in Movement** with drama groups throughout Europe, funded by Grundtvig. Directly inspired by **Seaside Memories**, it will explore the art of storytelling using the combined art forms of dance and performance for video. Media and drama teachers at each partner organisation will work with groups of disadvantaged adult learners to tell stories through the universal languages of image, sound, music, movement and dance. By minimising the use of the spoken word, we hope the work will communicate in ways that transcend linguistic barriers, whilst exploring the rich cultural traditions of the participants. The creative work will be devised for video camera and published through a joint web site, allowing the teachers and learners to share and discuss their experiences and celebrate their achievements, whilst engaging with an international audience.

The company is also developing a range of new projects for the Lowestoft area with a new company called Involve Educare. It will offer holidays, activities and engagement programmes for 12-25 year olds and adults with additional needs. Media Projects East will supply media, animation and arts projects for this client group, based at a newly acquired centre at Boston Lodge in Lowestoft.

We are also in discussion with Jayne Knight, Arts Development Manager for Suffolk County Council, with a view to looking at future funding avenues, such as Awards for All and The Big Lottery Reaching Communities Fund.

Lessons Learned

The main critique we have had from the students was that the project was perhaps over ambitious and, at times, over filled with activities. The creative professionals and historians each brought their own agendas and ideas regarding how to tackle the theme. In one sense this was very exciting, but sometimes it ran the risk of overwhelming the younger or less confident students.

These are some of the comments we received from the students:

"I really enjoyed having the chance to use a professional camera to take images of the characters I made. I least enjoyed not having many breaks. I would have liked longer to try things out. It was all too rushed."

"The thing I enjoyed most was the dressing up and acting. It was different and a good laugh."

" I can't wait till next week!"

"The film presentation was too long."

"I enjoyed making animations most. I liked how we could do what we wanted to create a film."

"I need chillout time."

"I enjoyed designing masks, making paper puppets, acting, using the camera and sound equipment. My favourite part was acting as a clown and making the video. I least enjoyed watching the slideshow because I would rather be doing things."