

IATL Student as Producer – ‘A Piece of Cod’ Final Report

‘A Piece of Cod’ was a tough learning process of a project, but valuable and unusual creative experience for all involved. The project was useful for opening up the devising process to people who often hadn’t been involved with it before, and giving a platform to fresh, unusual ideas that often don’t have space to grow in the Warwick theatre scene, but it required much more thorough organisation.

The process kicked off in week 3, as I enlisted the experience of 5 other people, including one enthusiastic first year, to run a workshop on devising starting points. This workshop was incredibly successful, providing an open, free space for a variety of devising exercises, exploring ideas from the theatrical, such as storytelling and contact improvisation, through to broad conceptual ideas like explorations of gender and claustrophobia. After the workshop, we allocated projects to interested attendees, giving them a choice of 4 mini-projects to get involved with: ‘storytelling’, ‘gender and devising’, ‘contact improvisation’ and ‘fragments & arguments’. We received great feedback from the workshop participants, and the debriefing session suggested that all of the exercise leaders were happy with what they’d learned about their ideas through it.

Unfortunately, the next stage of the process was the most patchy, disorganised section, and the area to really think about with regards to running projects-within-projects. With 4 separate project leaders, and everybody’s attentions divided between these and other productions, organising initial rehearsals became incredibly difficult, and many groups were unable to properly start until week 5/reading week. This made it clear to me that, in future, running projects like this will require intensive organisation on the part of the producer, and preferably weekly rehearsal dates to be set-up *prior* to the beginning of the project. However, the delay also allowed more time for me to get in contact with people who hadn’t previously been involved in Warwick drama and involve them in the project, so there were small benefits to the slow start.

However, even during this hiatus, we were able to develop the idea of exploring devising starting points through workshop participation. We made sure that each leader organised group participation in the Emerge/Arts Centre workshops, and we organised two very successful workshops for participants as well, with Andrew Turner and performance artist Bryony Kimmings. While the turnout to the Andrew Turner workshop was lower than expected, the Bryony Kimmings workshop was incredibly informative, and we were able to get 18 participants signed up from multiple departments and societies. This workshop was a 4-hour demonstration of Kimmings’ creative process, and included really unusual exercises, such as analysing and developing each individual person’s ‘performance personas’ and quickfire feedback exercises. The attention she gave each individual member during the workshop was extremely useful, providing recommendations for performances to watch, and performance ideas and styles to try out.

The rehearsal process itself, starting properly in week 5/6, really allowed us to experiment with wildly varying theatrical ideas. In spite of a limited time frame, the 'Gender and devising' group blended physical theatre, writing for performance techniques, inspiration from Shakespeare's 'Venus and Adonis' and cabaret, while the 'Fragments' project blended improvised storytelling, contact improvisation, Absurdism and Gob Squad-style theatrical games. Each group had a loose director-facilitator, able to bring the primary creative direction to the pieces, but also allowed the performers in each group to have a good level of control over the projects. This was an extremely democratic process that allowed plenty of individual perspectives to be brought to each project, and really helped with the exploration of devising starting points.

Finally, the performance showcase itself was an interesting evening for all performers and attendees, although there would be considerations about this for similar projects in the future. The showcase presented all four performances, with breaks for questions and feedback between, so each segment (performance + feedback) lasted roughly 20-30 minutes. Many people commented on how fun and interesting having an evening like that was, not only from the perspective of creating and developing similar work in the future, but simply in terms of establishing a performance precedent and community. We felt like this event was an overall success, but the limitation of only having one performance showcase was a real problem in terms of developing our ideas for the future. With the extensive feedback that was given to each individual project, it would have been far more useful to have the project extend over a longer period, with 2 or 3 separate showcase evenings over the whole process.

We feel that the ideas and performances set in motion by this project have largely been very worthwhile, although they may not become bigger projects themselves in the future. The major events of the workshops and performance showcase have been extremely successful, and the overall process was useful in developing and merging very unusual combinations of creative ideas, but there are important areas to develop in the future. Organisation and thorough marketing plans are vital, even for loose collections of projects such as this, and in any future projects of a similar nature, these would be vital considerations.