

An Interim Report for the IATL funded project: A being ObJECTIVE

Mary Courtney, Professor Patrick Unwin, Laurence Campbell, Solange Mouthaan, Charikleia Tzanakou, Rachel King.

Introduction

Primarily we want our students to a) be creative in a different way and b) be challenged in their thinking about the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity in the acquisition and generation of knowledge. c) We also want to have as an end product an innovative **animation** that can playfully provoke and be used in the future as a teaching tool and for open days.

There are three components to the “A being ObJECTIVE” project. The first is the opportunity to draw – to invent a new type of creature – a bee that has never been seen before – a creature that stretches the concept of a bee to its limit within just three parameters: it must have wings, stripes and a sting. This different type of creative challenge takes place in drawing workshops in a relaxed atmosphere, and with the drawings made by students across the science-arts-humanities spectrum used in the animation. Second is the making of the animation itself, and third is the screening and post-screening discussion, which will try out the animation as a tool for deepening thinking and debate about the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity in research.

The project involves a unique collaboration between two outsiders: Film-maker-animator Laurence Campbell and poet-artist Mary Courtney, plus academic staff across the disciplines of Chemistry, Law, Politics and International Studies, plus students across the different academic disciplines.

Progress: Evaluative Summary

The project is going extremely well.

We are on track with the timetable for the project.

We have had confirmation from Finance that we will have spent all the budget designated to us for the 2015-2016 financial year, by the end of July 2016. We anticipate spending all or most of the remainder of the budget for the 2016-2017 financial year by the end of the project.

All four of the bee drawing workshops have been completed - and the delightfully inventive creatures produced testify to meeting the aim of challenging students to be creative in a different way. All those who joined in the workshops contributed their drawings to the animation and these will be included in the animation later this year. The Staff involved in the project were successful in recruiting students from a wide spectrum of disciplines across the sciences (Chemistry, MAS and MOAC) arts, humanities and education. A PowerPoint with the drawings was sent to each of the participants after each workshop along with an invitation to the screening. In addition, Library staff and academic and support staff also joined in the workshops, which we see as a real bonus, a democracy of creativity. Film footage was taken in two of the workshops and photographs of the participants immersed in their drawings in the other two. We had 38 participants, which is in excess of the numbers estimated in the proposal, and all contributed their bees. All said they enjoyed themselves. In addition a further student has

been involved in making the model with the animator for Scene 3 and has learned the process of stop-motion animation through filming the model she co-created.

The animation itself is going really well creatively - and we are on schedule for the November 17th screening - which has been booked in the Humanities Studio for 2pm. It is such an exciting creative process. There have been 19 versions of the script - it keeps evolving. Scene one is now complete (the rough cut), the set has been made for scene two and the character designed - and the filming of a hallucinogenic looking chemical reaction completed – and we have made a start in the collecting of images for scene three and in making the model for this scene.

The reactions of the staff involved to seeing the rough cut of the first part of scene one was genuine excitement. The scene has also been shown to two students and their reaction was similar. This shows that we are most likely hitting the right note of playful and strange (at least for scene one!).

The animation will be around two minutes longer than proposed (which is a long time in animation terms when one second of film takes around 12 shots) as we (Laurence and Mary) could not resist developing a character called “Anna Lytic” for scene one. This means a lot of extra value for money for IATL, although it is perhaps not such a smart move for us financially.

Laurence is on track for the short film recording of the animation process.

It will not be possible to assess the effectiveness of the animation as a discussion tool until the time of the screening in November. Rachel King and Charikleia Tzanakou will lead discussion post-screening and will be preparing questions by September.

We have made links with the Film Department (Helen Wheatley) and with Prof Bruno Frenguelli and Joe Van de Weil from the School of Life Sciences, who are collecting images of brain scans for scene 3. We have plans to link with The English Department and the Psychology Department over the summer to see if they'd also like to contribute to scene 3 and be involved in the future in using the animation as a teaching tool. We will be following up the links IATL staff have suggested to contact in these departments (Heather Pilbin for instance). And we have made links with Ian Mason regarding screening on the large video screen in the new teaching and learning block.

Evidence

Any of the following are available to IATL on request:

List of the animations and other Video sources viewed as research for the project

Minutes of meetings with the collaborators

Script for the animation

Powerpoints x 4 from each of the bee drawing sessions

Scans of the bee drawings

Email invitations to the workshops

Drawing of Anna Lytic used to make the model.

The Poem “Anna Lytic”

Some stills of the development of the animation

IATL member Amy Clarke has viewed the rough cut of Sc 1. We would prefer to wait now to show the whole thing in November, but if required we can show the rough cut of what has been done up to this point.

Some detail about the animation itself

It combines a mix of film footage and images from the real world with an imagined animated world - and the boundaries between the two are not always clear. It also combines different styles of animation, including chalk and stop motion. Unusually for an animation it will include many different styles of drawing (of bees) from the students and staff. It aims to unsettle but be playful and strange at the same time. It doesn't provide answers and questions are only there as an undercurrent.

It comprises 3 scenes which can be watched independently of each other or one after the other. They are like vignettes, exploring the subjective-objective relationship from different angles.

Scene one sees the word "boing" morph into "being" and the introduction of the character **Anna Lytic** in her cutting room dissecting chop. (She is a personification of Objective: cool and blue, but with an anxious vulnerable aspect). Words from the poem about her come on screen "Nitty, picky, bitty", she "tidies the nicely precisely". There are sounds of scissors and chopping. Then she is taken by surprise by imagination – the portal to which appears as a hole she chances upon that is a deep underground opening. She backs away in resistance, but is swept up on a mobile phone flying carpet where she changes to **Anna Lyric**, stops moving like an automaton and flies along to a lively energising - and original - song (by Pat Unwin) with a swarm of very individual bees. A close up of the pupil of her eye reveals a bee in her reflection.

Scene two sees the word character **objective** walking along a tight-rope and then diving into a high rise chemical flask and **turning into the word subjective**. The tightrope is symbolic of the vulnerability of objectivity. Once in the flask the word character generates reaction in the fluid. Footage of the strange and compelling Belousov-Zhavotinsky reaction will be incorporated as well as swirls of dry ice - we filmed this in the Chemistry Department with the technical assistance of Marianne Costa and Eddie Ryan. Bees are witnesses to the dive. Audio from the chemistry department will be the sound background.

Scene three sees a character's head and behind the curtains of the head, brain activity. Inside this brain is **critical thinking** in critical condition, in need of **tickle thinking**. The images in the brain are part student notes, part anatomy of thinking, part real brain images from angiography, PET scans and MRI scans, EEGs, random images of thought flickers and drawings and an image from chemistry of electrochemical activity. The head changes into a flash of an apple and back again. The end result is scratching of the head as if to scratch an itch from a sting and the eruption from the head of new growths/worms like undercooked spaghetti with hats on. The head sticks its tongue out and the worms txt each other to ask what's going on.

Mary Courtney and Professor Patrick Unwin. 23 June 2016

1554 words