

Devising from Memory Boxes: some further insights

1. Stages in the devising process
2. Student attitudes to the project in progress:
Investment, engagement and doing the boxes justice.
3. Student reflections on the project and ongoing outcomes

1. Stages in the devising process

- Selection of boxes based on personal connections.
- Researching additional material.
- Visits (including from Helen Aronson and Alex Schweitzer)
- Interviewing people.
- Devising using reminiscence techniques (including narration and music).
- Performance of extracts in a gallery next to the boxes; performance of the full pieces at the conference.
- Reflections on the process.

2. Student attitudes to the project in progress: Investment, engagement, and doing the boxes justice.

- “I felt invested in Gerlinde’s story [...] I felt enveloped inside her memories [...] We identified with Gerlinde being separated from parts of her family, and feeling trapped” (Tamsin).
- “I was touched by all of the boxes I looked at. The personal nature of the boxes was so powerful. I felt that I was looking at a piece of a person’s life. [...] The boxes themselves are a brilliant way of connecting observers and researchers to living history and the people behind the stories.” (Tamsin)
- “I wanted to do justice to the memories of Gerlinde, and be respectful of everything she put into her memory box[...]. I didn’t want our ideas to misrepresent her life.” (Tamsin).

- “it’s people’s real lives that you’re dealing with so you want to make sure that not only are you doing yourself proud and you’re doing yourself justice when you stand up and perform, but you’re doing the person whose box it is proud.” (Maizy).
- “Nothing is irrelevant, everything is important, and you need to make sure that you show that in a really delicate way, because you don’t want to offend. [...] you need [...] a sense of care because these are people’s lives.” (Maizy).
- “Before the show I felt nervous, because we weren’t playing made up characters. I was being Karl, and I was very worried because I was portraying his life, I didn’t want to offend anyone or show him wrongly, show him not how he would like to be shown, or how he is actually was a person. That was always on my shoulders. [...] I felt emotionally drained afterwards. [...]” (Joe).

3. Student reflections and ongoing outcomes:

Pride

- “After the show I felt an overwhelming sense of pride for the work I had created, and I felt I had a lot of respect for my group for doing Helen’s story justice and creating a piece she enjoyed.” (Rennae).
- “I felt proud of what we had shown.” (Joe).
- “I felt like we had done something very important.” (Johan).
- “This memory box project is something that brings generations together, it links communities” (Johan). “The memory box became a common ground for people discuss. It can build friendships. Applied drama changes things for the better. It raises awareness. You all feel the same thing. The performers and audience link with that emotion [...]. It’s something that wakes loads of emotions in everyone.” (Joe).
- “The trust that we were given [...] was amazing. [...] to leave that responsibility in our hands...is amazing. We’ve experienced so many different things. I feel grateful.” (Joe).

Perspective

- “It all sort of puts your own life into perspective, you read some of these boxes and you think what these people have gone through, to be so mentally strong, and I moan about missing the bus, and these people have had to go across seas, and countries, and horrible things...” (Joe).
- “...every single box had a different story and it makes you realise that the worst thing a person has experienced is the worst thing a person has experienced...it’s all about perspective.” (Johan).
- “It’s helped me deal with things in my own life. I realise how much I moan about things. I needed reminiscence theatre in my life.” (Martina).

- “I feel so, so grateful that we got the opportunity to learn about reminiscence theatre and work with the memory box project as we have learnt so much from it [...] how your work within the community can really make a difference. I feel like that’s really important.” (Maizy).
- “Creating the performances from the memories within the boxes made us feel more deeply involved and able to empathise with the people who experienced those events. It would be a shame if the boxes were no longer displayed to the public, and if no further boxes were created. They are a great resource for history as well as for creating theatre and art.” (Tamsin).
- “I feel honoured to have been a part of it.” (Ardit).

The Memory Box project led to:

- A positive impact on student mental health
- The creation of lasting intergenerational relationships
- Inspiration to do reminiscence work with relatives
- The recognition that drama can really matter, which impacted on students' self-confidence as well as on their performance skills.