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Picturing Diversity

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Abstract

'Picturing Diversity' is a multimedia-based learning resource which aims to help learners to develop a better understanding of diversity and community issues through the use of video-based interviews, with local community members. The aim of this resource is to encourage students' to engage with some of the richness and complexity around such concepts as 'identity', 'community', 'diversity' and 'equality'.

Keyword: Diversity, Identity, Community, Diversity, Equality.

Background

The idea for this resource came directly from some of the issues and challenges that arose during the authors' experiences of teaching police studies students about equality and diversity as part of the 'Equality, Diversity and Rights' (HFD1001) module. Students often commented on the fact that they would value the input of people who identified with some of the strands of diversity addressed within the module, as they felt this would give them a more authentic picture of some of the concerns and issues that might arise. Although outside speakers are occasionally invited in to input on the Foundation Degree in Police Studies, putting together a regular programme of community member speakers, would be challenging both in terms of logistics and cost implications, as the module runs seven times in each academic year.

Methodology

The use of video interviews was felt to provide a useful opportunity to engage community members and effectively 'bring' their input into the university learning environment. It also enables a more inclusive, collaborative approach to teaching students about equality and diversity issues, in which the tutor is able to facilitate debate and discussion around the issues raised in community members' interviews, rather than attempting to 'speak on behalf' of communities themselves.

A pilot interview was carried out in October 2009 to test out the semi-structured interview format that the project team had developed as a template for the entire interview schedule. This also enabled the project team to develop a method of working with the technical support team who took care of the video-recording process and video capturing.

Following this pilot interview the project team reviewed the footage to assess the utility and transferability of the interview format and monitor the quality of the audio and video image. A decision was made to adopt a fairly 'low-tech' approach to the video recording in that a portable, consumer-level digital video camera was used within a quiet (but not sound-proofed) room. This 'low-tech' approach was felt to be more adaptable and flexible than booking specialist equipment and/or attempting to access custom built recording studios (of which some are available on campus). This was mainly driven by a realisation that community members who volunteered to be interviewed required a certain amount of flexibility, and on occasion were only available in the early evenings when technical staff were not on hand.

Having reflected on the approach and results from the pilot interview the project team was able to progress to the next stage of identifying and interviewing community members.

Initial plans for recruiting community members to take part in the project were based around a desire to provide a fairly even coverage of issues that relate to the six strands of diversity as recognised in most police-based diversity training.

These strands are:

1. Race and ethnicity
2. Gender, including transgender
3. Age
4. Disability
5. Religion and belief
6. Sexual orientation

A combination of approaches were used in order to recruit potential interviewees including:

- Contacts provided by the Community Liaison Officer at West Yorkshire Police
- The team's network of occasional external speakers and p/t lecturers
- Contacts through the project team members' external networks

The identification and recruitment of community members who were willing to participate in the project took longer than the project team originally anticipated, and this in turn delayed the start of the filming schedule.

Potential participants were fully briefed in relation to the project aims and outcomes and consent was sought to use their interviews within the context of a learning resource that would be used by student police officers, and potentially on other university courses. The question schedule was made available to potential interviewees prior to them attending for interview, in order to outline the areas of discussion and allow them to consider their responses. Participants were also asked to sign the university's standard model release form in relation to the use of still and moving images. The interviewees were issued with community vouchers in recognition of their contribution to the project. Unfortunately we did not managed to recruit a member of the lesbian, gay or bisexual community and so instead utilised another resource which was publicly available.

The interviews were conducted during the period from October 2009 to January 2010. Some interviews had to be rescheduled due to participant's commitments and/or illness, and it was necessary to offer some flexibility in this regard. The majority of interviews took place in the Ramsden Building (University of Huddersfield) but in some instances arrangements were made to film in a location that was more convenient for the participant (in one case this was the interviewee's home and in another it was a community centre).

The arranging and sequencing of interviews was reliant on the availability of the interviewee, the project staff involved in conducting the interviews and the technical support staff. Consequently the filming process extended over a slightly longer period than was projected in the original project timeline.

Challenges and Opportunities

The project presented a number of challenges and opportunities. In relation to the former, these included:

- Video recording was sometimes problematic in 'off-campus' venues as it was difficult to anticipate or control background noise and/or lighting conditions.
- The recruitment of interviewees required more effort than was originally anticipated.

- There was a tension between developing a resource that would be sufficiently policing-focused to engage police studies students, whilst also being mindful of the generic application of interviews to other professional learning situations.
- In practice the interview format and range of questions was appropriate to most of the interviews, although in future more thought should be given to the precise wording of questions in relation to avoiding specialist terms or academic vocabulary.

Opportunities included:

- There was an under-spend in relation to monies spent on audio-visual support, which meant that the project team was able to undertake additional interviews. One example was the inclusion of multiple interviews in relation to a community project in Bradford, which included young people, community leaders and a retired community police officer.
- Interview material was found to contain material which is relevant not only to the 'Equality, Diversity and Rights' module, but also other areas of the police studies programme including 'Social and Community Issues' and 'Assessment, Advice and Support'.

A decision was made to contract the multimedia development process to the School's Learning and Teaching Support Unit. The reasons for this were to ensure that there was a close liaison between the multimedia developers and the project team, and also with a view to making the redevelopment of the resource more viable. The School Learning and Teaching Support Unit will be able to work with other academics across the school or university to re-edit sections of the resource, if necessary, in order to make it available for use on other programmes of study.

After the project team reviewed all of the video footage taken during the interviews, and had begun to write generic, contextual learning materials addressing the key strands of diversity, a decision was made to clearly separate the final outputs, as follows:

1. The **Picturing Diversity interview bank** will contain the video interviews which will be embedded in web pages which contain brief notes and prompt questions to help students consider the issues that each interviewee has raised.
2. The **contextual learning materials** contain extensive notes around key ideas, theories and principles involved in learning about diversity issues. This will be realised in the form of a web site divided into a number of key units.

This decision was reached after extensive discussion about the need for us to avoid 'shoe-horning' interviewees identities and community affiliations into 'neat', prescribed categories. To do this would have risked denying the richness and complexity of some of the responses we received to the interview questions. It would have also defeated the purpose of trying to bring the perspective of real community members into the classroom. From this perspective we soon realised that pedagogically, and ethically, we needed to ensure that the interviews remained 'open-texts', and that we resisted applying our own pedagogically-driven meta-narratives.

Planning and development meetings took place between the project team and the multimedia developers, to plan:

1. The development of a visual identity for the project outputs.
2. The development of the contextual learning resource into a set of coherent, navigable and visually appealing web pages
3. The editing of the video materials and the production of brief title sequences and credits.
4. The format of the final outputs and the way in which the resources will link together.

The module teaching team for 'Equality, Diversity and Rights' piloted the use of the 'Picturing Diversity' resource with Cohort 38 (n=20) of the Foundation Degree in Police Studies. This began in the week commencing 19th April 2010 and was used across a number of sessions within the module.

Students in Cohort 38 were asked to complete a questionnaire and data was collected on how usable, useful and engaging they found the resource. Comments on future improvements and developments were also solicited in order that the project team can best plan how to incorporate the resource into the broader delivery.

It is recognised that such a comparison only has the scope to offer broad insights into whether the resource is seen as an effective way of learning and equality and diversity issues, given the range of potential variables involved.

Results

The evaluation showed that the paper-based study pack was important in terms of students' preferences for learning with 80% of those undertaking the evaluation stating that they preferred the paper-based study pack, 15% stating that they preferred the web-based resource and 5% of students indicating no preference. In terms of the version that they actually used 100% of students stated that they used the paper-based version but 25% stated that they used a combination of the paper-based version and the web-version and no students stated that they used the web-version alone.

Of the students surveyed 70% agreed they had extensive prior knowledge of diverse communities which is a reflection of the fact that there were a number of ex-Police Community Support Officers in this cohort. When considering the impact of the learning from the resource 70% agreed that learning from resource would impact on their work with communities and 15% disagreed. Similarly, 65% indicated that learning from the resource was relevant to their role as police officer. The learning units themselves received positive feedback in that 60% rated them as being useful, 90% indicated that they were easy to read and 55% stated that unit activities were useful in developing their learning and understanding of equality and diversity issues. A number of areas for further development were identified and are summarised below:

- Faith, religion and belief unit
- Video interviews need further editing
- Tie-clip microphones should be used in any future interviews as background noise is distracting, and more noticeable on classroom-based speakers
- Students felt some interviews questions encouraged repetition...indicated they would like more input into deciding questions asked.
- Time allocation for working through units and activities: majority felt they were given too much time
- Review mix of classroom based and independent learning activities – give more flexibility
- Incorporation of activity responses into formative or summative assessment

Discussion

The multimedia resource has been developed with a view to enabling colleagues from other discipline areas to customise it for their own discipline needs as far as possible. This would require edits to be carried out by a web developer and this guided our decision to have the resource developed by multimedia technicians within the school. Retaining the source files,

and the rights to edit these as required, was key to ensuring that the resource remained 'open' and amenable to adaptation.

The project has utilised a fairly 'low-tech' approach to recording video interviews. This would make it relatively easy to conduct further interviews in the future assuming that time, school-based technical support and community vouchers for interviewees could be made available. The resource itself would benefit from the additional of further interviews as it would help to emphasise the range of difference within diverse communities themselves, and/or help students to grasp some of the complexities around individual's sense of community identity.

The project team are continuing to publicise the existence of the project with a view to establishing a list of potential future interviewees. Also, the dissemination events described above were intended to encourage colleagues within the university, and at Bishopgarth Police Training Centre, to think about how they might adapt and/or add to the resource.

This project has not only allowed the project team to develop an interactive learning resource which promises to enable students to have a closer engagement with some of the views and experiences of community members in relation to equality and diversity issues, but also provides an interesting model of how the wider community can contribute to the development of university learning resources.

A natural extension to this project would be to continue to conduct audio or video interviews with community members with a view to making it richer and more diverse. Whilst this would involve further staff hours (both academic and technical) we feel that the straightforward, low-tech working methods that we have employed would make this achievable and realistic. Audio-only interviews should also be investigated as a quick and convenient method of capturing community members' experiences. You can access the diversity videos via http://webdev.hud.ac.uk/schools/hhs/james/picturing_diversity/index.html