Hearing the student voice
Promoting and encouraging the effective use of the student voice to enhance professional development in learning, teaching and assessment within higher education

An ESCalate-funded project involving Napier University, Leeds Metropolitan University, UCE Birmingham and the University of Westminster

Case study

Title

Provide a suitable title for your case study 'My first year experience': constructing student video diaries

Institution

Provide the name of your institution Napier University

Background

In about 100 words describe the background to this activity In planning an internal staff conference *Firm Foundations: equipping new students to succeed*, it was agreed that employing the student voice at the start of the day would enable staff participants to better understand the experiences and issues of first year students and be more open to the ideas, interventions and practices which they would encounter later in the day and could adopt. To be effective the student voice portrayed was required to: * be authentic and present real issues * highlight critical 'at risk' times in the first year * highlight the behaviour of 'at risk' students * identify the staff support, interaction and feedback which make a difference to students * not identify individual students. For these reasons the student voice was employed through the use of video diaries constructed from views elicited in student surveys and acted out by students.

The challenge

What were the issues that lead to this activity?
Conference focus on the needs of students for effective interventions to enable them to become successful learners.

Why was it decided to employ the student voice?
Important for staff to hear the authentic voice to:
* help offset any pre-conceived assumptions about the first year experience
* appreciate the issues which students face in adjusting to university life – academic and social
* develop an emotional connection with students to better empathise with their perspectives
* learn what support, interactions and feedback can make a difference to first year students

Solution

Describe in some detail how the activity works
How were students recruited for this activity?
In what way is the student voice employed?

Using authentic comments taken from the current Student Satisfaction Survey, scripts were developed for 4 student profiles:
* mature, female,
* school leaver, male,
* direct entry student, male
* international student, male

The scripts covered student attitudes to their experience at key times during the year:
*first few days
*first assessment
*Christmas
*end of academic year

Through the School of Computing, digital media student filmmakers were recruited who then recruited appropriate fellow students as the four actors. The actors were filmed acting out their parts at the four key times listed above and a DVD was produced.

The DVD has been developed ethically in that it captures and portrays real student views but does not expose individuals.

Results

What have the results of this activity been?
What is the evidence, if any, for the benefits of this activity?
In what ways, if any, did employing the student voice make a difference?

Part of the DVD (2 students) was played at the start of the staff conference and made an impact on participants engendering much discussion and debate about what the students had said both on the day – and still now!

Evaluations included:

Most felt it had been a positive experience:
Comments included: *Caught my attention, powerful stuff!, 'rang true', brings issues to life, the impact of a 'live' student beats the books anytime*

Many indicated that employing the student voice had made a difference to them:
Comments included: *Without empirical evidence we're left with guess work and even if our guesses are good, we can't know all the ways that students experience their first year; more immediate and effective in getting the message over than having a member of staff presenting anecdotal evidence.*

Some indicated that it would make a difference to their practice:
Comments included: E*asy to relate to and think of the implications for teaching and learning*; *gave me confidence to continue to refine my teaching; ideas for practical input on my programme.*
Some staff detailed how their practice would change.

Learning points

What were the key points for success?
Undoubtedly using authentic, genuine student views which both surprised, engaged and moved staff.

Enthusiasm of the students involved who made an effort both in the casting, preparation, props, acting and filming which ensured that the actors came across as real students.

Telling a 'story' – important for the script to be carefully developed to tell a story about the individual portrayed, their experience and their reactions to it.

What were the things you would do differently if starting again?
Nothing

What were/are the main risks?

Selection:
Important for the messages to be succinct and well made. Could have been dangerous if the film had been longer and there had been too much repetition.

Using humour:
The humour in the DVD was genuine: both an unfortunate incident experienced by the mature student and the naïve over-indulgence of the school leaver were derived from actual survey comments. One member of staff was concerned that we were laughing at the students and found this uncomfortable although after some discussion agreed the laughter was more related to the humorous incidents and the accuracy of the stereotype portrayed. Important to be careful about using humour appropriately

Amateurism
Important for actors to be convincing and filmmakers professional. If not the message could be lost and the investment worthless.

Resources

What resources did the activity take in terms of time, money, goodwill and human resources?

The digital media student and the student 'actors' did not ask for remuneration – looking at the experience as a useful learning opportunity for themselves. However as a fair amount of time had gone into setting the scenes, rehearsing, filming and editing etc, all the student participants (5) were rewards with Amazon tokens to a modest value.

The development of the script by EdDev staff was a very time-consuming task – 5 days work approx. Although it did give those involved an opportunity to become familiar with the many comments made by students in the surveys used.

A member of school staff liaised between the students and the 'clients' (EdDev) and ensured the project was on-track.

A tangible resource - the DVD – has been produced and is now available for use in other staff development contexts and has been employed in professional development workshops and other events.

Support implications

What are the 'support implications' in terms of the resources required for this activity to continue?

None – unless edits of the DVD re required.

Further information

Is there any further information you would like to provide?
The DVD has been used as an example of the student voice in external educational development conferences and very positive comments about its value have been made. The potential for its generic use in other institutions has also been raised.