Developing student autonomy through the production of a public history resource

Emma Robertson (D&S)

Background:
- New history lecturer aiming to improve IT/ media skills of self and students
- New level six module provided scope for new kinds of assessment
- Decision to adopt the 'Inspirational Learning' methodology which uses film to in-spire students (by Keith Radley)
- Similar UCLAN project in which students created community history resource

Rationale/ Aims:
- To enhance learner autonomy through offering students ownership over their own projects
- To encourage creativity as a way to inspire learning
- To enhance students' self-confidence through a challenging, but supported, assessment task
- To enhance digital fluency skills by requiring a multi-media element to be part of each project
- To improve relationships between staff and students, particularly through learning environments which emphasised collaboration rather than hierar-chies
- To improve connections between history staff and LTI staff

Northern Soul:
Constructions of Regional Identity in the North of England, 1850-1980

Level 6 History Option Module
20 Credits
Semester 2 2008-9

Number of students: 29
Module Team: Emma Robertson (leader),
Keith Radley, Richard Mather, John Tanner

Approach/ Method:
- Lectures/ seminars weeks 1-6 provide background and overview of topic, and ideas for projects
- Group visit to National Coal Mining Museum in week 7 encourages students to consider approaches to public history
- Students produce public history resources in small teams of 3-5 students on the topic of 'Sheffield: a typical northern city?'
- Project must include primary source materials and a multi-media element, and be suitable for a general audience
- Suggested formats included film, wiki, booklet, but students decide for themselves which format is most appropriate
- Support provided for projects in workshop sessions from weeks 8-12
- Workshops provide variety of learning environments (Local Studies Library and Adsetts Extension)
- LTI staff provide additional guidance on film-making and technological support (e.g on use of editing suites)
- End of module showcase for students to view all projects

Assessment:
- Task 1: Individual essay (40%)
- Task 2: Group project (30%)
- Task 3: Individual project report evaluating their project with reference to module themes (30%)

Evaluation:
- Mid-semester and end of module questionnaires
- Focus groups (6 students)
- Tutor's teaching/ learning diary
- Video interviews on 'Inspirational Learning' methodology with Keith Radley

Summary

Successes:
- High quality projects produced
- Good relationships between students and tutors on a collaborative rather than hier-archical model
- High degree of peer collaboration
- Digital fluency skills of students – and module tutor – enhanced
- Students (and staff) working with people outside the university
- Increased self-confidence of students
- Improved networks between history tutor and LTI staff

Challenges/ difficulties:
- Overambitious projects
- Weighting of group project did not reflect time/effort of students
- Clash of projects with final year dissertations
- Uploading final projects through Blackboard proved difficult for students – and staff
- Accessing equipment (for tutor)
- Managing and marking projects submitted in a variety of different media
- Liaising with external agents

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