



8.2 Transforming student experience on the Photography BA (Hons) course

The cohort

In a cohort of 114 students on the BA (Hons) Photography course only 17 of the students are BME (15%).

Factor that triggered the interventions

I was approached by BME and LGBT students in our cohort about their dissatisfaction with what they saw as a white, straight male-centric curriculum. The students on the photography course also pointed to the lack of diversity within classes both in terms of student numbers and in terms of the mostly white teaching staff.

Interventions

We decided to change the pedagogical approach to classes as well as the development of a human rights component to a documentary module. This new component challenged dominant perspectives and asked the students to reflect upon their own world view, politics, values and artistic practices.

- 1. Human Rights and the Image** In designing this new component for the level 4 documentary module, I knew that it was important to model an understanding of perspective and the differences there may be to the mainstream views. Students were asked to find a localised artistic project that had resonance for them personally and to consider not only their own perspective but also that of their photographic subjects.
- 2. Normalising BME Art** As a black tutor on the Photography course I explicitly critiqued dominant perspectives by examining examples of my own work and publications/practices as well as those of other BME artists to promote an understanding of the BME artist within photographic culture and practice.
- 3. Autograph: ABP visits** This is an international charity that promotes and archives work by photographers and film makers who focus on race identity and human rights. We included visits to the organisation as well as guest lectures delivered at LSBU in their course. These events allow students to see the breadth and depth of work that challenges a mainstream point of view and encounter ways to deal with topics they might find fraught with tension.
- 4. Community Projects** We wanted to help the students recognise the place and power of art within the community. This year's level 5 group show will be held in Peckham – an area



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of multiple deprivation where approximately half the population is BME. A community arts project involving level 4 and 5 students is also planned for Peckham in 2017-18.

Outcomes

The outcomes of challenging dominant perspectives and the embedding of BME artists in the course is evident in the attitude and awareness students bring to their work. Workbooks of both BME and white students include more investigation of black artists previously seen as outside the mainstream. The students are also more questioning, seeking out tacit rules and transgressing them through their artwork. The idea that art is more than the product of elite white men and that acknowledging difference brings legitimacy to artists previously ignored encourages our BME students to see themselves as becoming successful artists and helps create strong voices unafraid to present their view.

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