

case study

Carmarthenshire
CONNECT



CYSWLLT
Sir Gaerfyrddin

Evaluating 'Keeping It Real' Using Digital Media and ICT

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Summary

This case study describes how low cost digital video cameras can be used to collect longitudinal project evaluation data. Carmarthenshire Connect supported participants in a youth theatre project to record evaluation interviews with each other throughout the life of the project.

Background

Mess Up The Mess are a youth theatre company based in the Upper Amman Valley Communities First area. The Keeping It Real / Cadw'r Cywir project employed professional actors and a writer / director to work with groups of young people in schools and youth clubs in Carmarthenshire and Powys to devise and perform a bilingual play based on their ideas. Throughout the process, youth members of Mess Up The Mess acted as a youth panel, overseeing the direction of the project and ensuring that young people's input was respected and reflected in the final production. Members of Mess Up The Mess also took part in the performances.

Carmarthenshire Connect had previously undertaken some outreach work with Mess Up The Mess and were invited to support the group to use digital media in the evaluation of Keeping It Real / Cadw'r Cywir.

Engagement Purpose

Purpose: To support members of Mess Up The Mess to use digital media to collect evaluation evidence throughout the process of the Keeping It Real / Cadw'r Cywir project. As part of their funding agreement, Mess Up The Mess had committed to evaluating a number of aspects of the project using digital means.

Engagement Process

An initial meeting with Mess Up The Mess confirmed the objectives of the evaluation: it was to concentrate on evaluating the experiences of young people working with professionals and the use of a bilingual working process.

Carmarthenshire Connect had recently purchased 5 low cost 'Busbi' digital video cameras. Working with Mess Up The Mess, a number of exercises were developed which used these cameras to gather specific data in support of the evaluation objectives. These included:

Cue cards – A4 cards with printed phrases acting as a prompt for participants to express their views and feelings on camera. For example at the first workshop a 'Hopes and Fears' card was used and participants were asked to talk about their hopes and fears for the project. Halfway through the project a "Last Week... / This Week..." card allowed participants to reveal how their opinions had changed during the process.

Interview Questions – A5 question cards which participants use to record interviews with each other. For example "What do you think of the process so far?"

My Word – Participants are given a blank A4 card and asked to choose a word (in English or Welsh) that sums up their feelings about the project. If they cannot think of a word, they are asked to make one up. Participants film each other holding up their cards and explaining their choice of word.

One or more of these exercises was undertaken at the end of each workshop session with the youth panel. The material collected was uploaded to a private blog to which all the participants had access, allowing discussion to continue in the breaks between workshop sessions.

The use of the 'Busbi' cameras appeared to break down barriers: when filming, participants adopted the characters of interviewer and interviewee making it easier for them to talk freely and reflect on what they had been doing. As they became more comfortable with the process, participants gained confidence in adding their own 'follow up' questions, examining the reasons behind each others' opinions and feelings, and naturally began to gather richer material for evaluation.

All the material gathered during the process was copied to a CD and used to inform and support the evaluation report submitted to the project's funders. The material published to the private project blog also enabled the participants to review their own experiences of the project and identify how they had developed through the process.

Benefits and Drawbacks

Benefits

- A good method of gathering longitudinal evaluation data that has considerable novelty value for participants
- An enjoyable method of evaluation that may be more appropriate and successful for young people's groups than more traditional 'dry' methods
- Encourages personal reflection that may not occur with more traditional methods
- The process of collecting their feedback at the end of each session constantly clarified that participants' views were wanted and valued
- Recording videos of participants provides rich data which may have greater impact when presenting results

Drawbacks

- Some potential for disruption to the main activity if evaluation activity is not kept separate
- Necessity to be strict with oneself and ensure adequate time is reserved for evaluation activity at the end of each session
- Process can generate a great deal of data which may prove difficult to analyse

References

<http://www.carmsconnect.org.uk/2008/07/keeping-it-real.html>

<http://www.carmsconnect.org.uk/2008/07/keeping-it-real-opens-this-week.html>

<http://www.messupthemess.co.uk>