

Co-researching the learning experiences of Black Sport & Fitness students: A staff-student investigation

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Rationale:

There is an awarding gap between Black students and those from other ethnic groups on OU Sport & Fitness (S&F) modules, reflecting wider institutional and sector trends.

Aims:

To explore the learning experiences of Black students – focusing particularly on:

- relationships with tutors
- relationships with other students
- Connections to module materials

Methods:

The student researchers led the recruitment of 7 Black OU students who had studied S&F modules via a recruitment video.

Two online focus groups were facilitated by the student researchers who had received training in advance. Focus groups lasted between 1-2 hours.

Data was analysed qualitatively and independently by 3 members of the team, including one student researcher.

Staff – Student Collaboration

Two current OU students were recruited (and paid) to join the team as researchers.

Students had lived experience of:

- Being Black OU students
- Studying OU modules



So What?

Data suggests that while the Black student participants experienced issues common to many OU students, these might be felt more acutely and in different, racialised ways to white students. These different experiences are not particularly understood or catered for within current module provision.

What Next?

A follow-on PRAXIS project will explore how Black students can be better supported by peers through their modules. Ongoing dissemination of findings.

The Learning Environment:

- Students faced multiple external pressures on their time to study
- An instrumental approach to learning was evident – completing over achieving
- *Common pressures for OU students could be faced more acutely and differently by Black students*

The Learning Community:

- Students regularly felt isolated during studies
- Lacked confidence and wanted regular re-assurance they were on track
- Took a 'back seat' approach in tutorials
- *Common to many OU students – but experienced differently by Black students (e.g. racialised imposter syndrome?)*

Learning Relationships

- Important to connect with and develop trust with tutors very early in module
- Tutors pre-judged capabilities and were harder on TMA mistakes/rushed work
- Compared themselves negatively to white students - felt like (white) students able to 'play the game' better
- *Need to encourage support networks; continue to challenge 'deficit' approach among tutors*

