Supporting cohesion and inclusion in colleges



A guide for enrichment staff in colleges

Youth Social Action and Enrichment Programme

This resource has been created bythe Regional Enrichment Coordinator for Yorkshire and Humber, Florence Smith-Drayson. This role is part of the Youth Social Action and Enrichment Programme, which is currently in phase three and operating in Yorkshire and Humber.

Cohesion and Inclusion in Colleges

Colleges are currently operating in a political climate that is unpredictable and divisive. Learners represent a snapshot of society and the demographics in colleges are similar to the ones in the towns and cities that they operate, therefore colleges have an important role in ensuring that the division and hostility is not replicated inside their buildings so that everyone is self and welcome to experience education.

Inclusion is everyone's responsibility, but it often comes to enrichment teams to run activities and events that promote cohesion and inclusivity. This resource provides examples and ideas for professionals (both enrichment and others) in colleges to run events, activities and interventions.

Inclusive Events and Activities

Colleges can run events and activities with the aim of bringing people together, sharing cultures and heritage and celebrating diversity.

For individuals who hold negative views toward certain groups, meaningful exposure is essential. Having positive interactions with members of those groups is the most effective way to challenge these biases; it reduces prejudice, increases trust and helps create a sense of unity. This is called contact hypothesis. However, when doing so it is vital that you use your judgement in circumstances where people's viewpoints might create hostility and tension. Additionally, ensure you have consent from all individuals before creating any conscious exposure.

The Bridge Builders Handbook provides a more in-depth look at how to build communities when there is division.

ACTIVITY	DETAILS	RESOURCES AND RESEARCH
Run events celebrating diversity	Events celebrating culture are popular in colleges. Host over one or multiple days and base the days on an area of EDI. Have students come up with stalls and activities to run, invite in local organisations and create ways to engage the student community.	Northern School of Art students ran a student-led project aiming to bring their students together with diversity celebration days, after experiencing riots in their town. You can read about their project here.
Run social activities with a goal of integrating students and	Run an activity like sports, learning new skills, like music or cooking, and actively invite students that might not usually engage, so that the students	Dudley college used football as a way to bring students together and bridge divides. You can read

creating new communities	can meet new people.	more about their project here.
Create a shared display that represents the college community	Ask students to help you create a display such as a mural, banner, or bunting. The students can add something that represents them, therefore the display will illustrate and celebrate the diversity in the college.	Craftivism is a technique used by many to get messages across in a peaceful way. You can learn more about craftivism here.
Run a 'Great Get Together' event	Jo Cox Foundation are a charity that promote and support community cohesion and they operate in West Yorkshire. Every year, they ask communities to host a Great Get Together in June, which aims to bring communities together through a shared activity.	Find more examples of the events and resources on the Jo Cox website.
Host a 'Big Lunch'	The Big Lunch is organised by Eden Project Communities and they encourage people to host a lunch within their community. Alternatively, they also promote The Big Help Out, where individuals volunteer their time, or The Big Do, where you combine the two.	Resources and information can be found on the website.
Faith celebrations	Running faith-based celebrations allows those with faith to feel represented and share their traditions and culture, whilst also exposing individuals to different practices	

	and activities that they might not have experienced before.	
Run a Peoples' Assembly as part of student voice	Peoples' Assemblies are a community organising technique used to bring communities together to discuss important topics and make decisions. They are an effective way for people to have influence, and therefore feel a sense of pride and ownership over their local area/organisation. They also support people connecting across difference.	Humanity Project are championing peoples' assemblues and have produced a guide and a film that can educate you further. You can find information and resources on their website here.
Deliver a Weaving Trust Workshop	A Weaving Trust was developed by Citizens UK, a community organising group. The idea to foster social cohesion by getting individuals to have short conversations with each other, followed by reflection and sharing.	This blog post explains the process of a Weaving Trust event and the impact of one held in Bristol.
Do some awareness raising around refugee and asylum seekers aimed at the general college population	Creating resources about refugees, asylum seekers and immigration can help dispel myths and prejudice that individuals may have. Resources could be shared on posters and leaflets or on slides during PSHE sessions.	This website provides myth busting information that can be used in a resource. Becoming an FE college of sanctuary can show your commitment to supporting santuary seekers.

Place based activities

There are many psychological, geographical and sociological theories around 'sense of place'. A 'sense of place' is the emotional and psychological attachment people form with a location. It combines the physical and cultural features of a space with the emotional associations, memories and meanings assigned to a space. It is deeply important because it fosters human identity, belonging, and personal stability.

Running activities based on 'place' can help people feel a sense of shared identity - "we all belong to this college". This can create common ground between people and help individuals find a sense of belonging. The concept of 'place' can act as an effective stimulus to drive activities, events and conversations.

ACTIVITY	DETAILS	RESOURCES AND RESEARCH
Celebrate heritage by engaging students in heritage projects or events	Celebrating the heritage of area or the people from an area focuses on place. Heritage helps build social capital, often called the 'glue that binds communities together' (Haldane, 2018). Run a project or event that encourages students to learn about an aspect of local heritage and celebrate it.	National Lottery have a Heritage fund, which has supported many organisations with projects on heritage. They have created guidance on engaging young people on heritage, as well as examples of projects. You can see this here.
Hold an activity based on 'The Story of England in 50 objects'	The concept of 'The Story of England in 50 objects' was created by Andy Green. The idea is *'A very English chat'* works to tackle England's growing	You could engage in this activity by running activities out of the free workbooks available

	social division and polarisation with a simple response to a potentially difficult and divisive question around '*What does it mean to be English in 2026?*'	on the website. Alternatively, you could create your own project and focus on your local area.
Create an art project based on place	Many artists based their work around 'place' or community. Understanding more about local artists and how they represent the area can bring a sense of pride and can increase 'cultural capital' in students. Producing a shared artwork or exhibition about the current area and communities can help people understand and feel pride in their community.	The links below contain examples of and resources for projects that have worked on community and place: Brighton Biennale resource Barking and Dagenham college Art Lab: A place for conversation Lens Lab project Wanderland: Wildways
Volunteering together	Doing activities to improve the local area assists students in community engagement and civic pride. Go out and spend time doing things to improve the local area.	

Supporting integration

For some students such as ESOL students, support to integrate is important. Many can feel unsafe or unconfident trying to engage with the wider student population or the town or city. Providing structured ways to engage can help overcome barriers to engagement including language and confidence in use of language, financial barriers and trauma.

As well as the above, the following activities can directly help students with integration.

ACTIVITY	DETAILS	RESOURCES AND RESEARCH
Buddy/mentor scheme	You could set up a scheme or programme that supports your ESOL students, or other students that are not integrated, to become more integrated. Students from the standard provision can support by running activities, events or being mentors to individuals or groups.	Leeds City College set up a Language Buddies programme where students volunteered and ran events and activities for ESOL students. You can read the case study here.
Messages of support	Creating a display using messages from students at the college. This demonstrates that college is a safe place and that people are welcomed. This can be very important when people are getting negative messages from news outlets and feel unsafe in other spaces.	

Run a project/event with your target group	Running a social action project with the students can help them feel powered and given them self efficacy, when there are many forces attempting to take away peoples' rights. Empowering students to feel that their voice is heard supports their confidence to feel that they can integrate.	English for Action use Community Organising to empower ESOL students when learning English. See their approach here. ACT:ESOL is a drama project, which champions Language, Resistance and Theatre. Use this resource for information on delivering social action projects.

Find out more about the AoC Youth Social Action and Enrichment programme here.

projects@aoc.co.uk
www.aoc.co.uk