

# Equality, Diversity and inclusion – Using Film & the Aftermath Debate to Tackle Racism

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*Re:Tension is a short 20 minute film that follows Thapelo, a bright and capable university student, on a day where he is unwittingly forced to question the judgements of his tutors and peers, and delve deeper into his own actions, choices and beliefs. Re:Tension addresses the topic of institutional racism and the gap in student retention amongst BAME (Black, Asian and Minority, Ethnic) students within British universities. The film was inspired by analysing statistical data that highlighted the unexplained dropout rate of BAME students as well as attempting to provide real insights into unconscious racial harassment within the higher education system and micro-aggressions that often go unnoticed.*

*To accompany the film, a toolkit, developed by Senior Teaching Fellow Syra Shakir in collaboration with Ricardo Barker, uses the film and the aftermath debate to openly challenge racism and discrimination. It encourages group discussion around accountability and responsibility, this journal hopes to describe how this work has been adapted to bring these challenges to the attention of degree apprentices at Leeds Trinity University, with the aim that it will empower them to challenge such inappropriate behaviour within their workplace and take positive action. (Ricardo Barker, 2021)*

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## **Introduction**

When delivering teaching and learning to any learner, from primary school age to post graduate students, it is essential that the topic of Equality, Diversity and inclusion (EDI) is integrated and positively promoted within their learning, ensuring that, not only is there a clear awareness of those protected characteristics as set out in the Equality Act of 2010, there is also an awareness of fair treatment for all.

To take this teaching to the next level. Lessons should be structured to include the learning aims and objectives which set out how learners can be developed and prepared to go out in to their communities with the tools and knowledge they need which will enable them to challenge inappropriate behaviours by members of the community which subsequently result in more positive action.

This journal aims to guide practitioners as to how this could be done via the use of video and the aftermath debate with a specific focus on racism. October 2022 is black history month and the theme of 'Time for Change: Action Not Words' has been adopted so it is intended that this journal will help to also promote this theme.

Why is the topic essential?

- Society – act of 2010,
- Protected characteristics
- Within business, emphasis on these topics to comply
- Consequently essential apprentices at all levels, not just those commencing a programme of study at level 4 or level 7.
- It is not a 'bolt on' or a hoop to jump through. Trick is to ensure the apprentices see the value of this message
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- As mentioned in the introduction....
- On top of this, various regulatory bodies now check delivery .... Hence why many training providers see it as a bolt on to tick that box.

Regulatory bodies

- Ofsted
  - ESFA
  - QAA
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- However not embracing this and ensuring that apprentice's learn to see that an individual's behaviour can have such a big impact. Lack of recognition of the importance of such matters in the work place could result in misconduct issues and failure to meet the regulatory framework – businesses being prosecuted

- Employees not knowing how to behave and making situations awkward

### **Our Approach**

My remit was to develop lessons which could be used during induction to introduce EDI as well as safeguarding and Prevent Duty and British Values. My initial plan was to focus on EDI develop teaching and learning sessions which would engage the apprentices ensuring that the topic is valuable and as engaging as possible to the audience.

From talking to previous cohorts of apprentices who had received delivery of the topics, many comments included:-

- There was a lack of an understanding as to why they needed to be taught the topic
- Little or no interaction or discussion with others
- Questions were raised such as
  - 'We do this at work, it is compulsory, why do we need to do it again?'
  - 'Why is this relevant to me and my programme?'

I wanted to move away from the traditional lecture approach to delivering this topic, as mentioned earlier I was conscious of ensuring that this was deemed as a valuable experience, and apprentices could leave us with a clear understanding as to why reinforcement of this topic is an essential element of their studies, knowing that they had learnt a valuable lesson which they could take away to their organisations.

During the Leeds Trinity University Teachers Conference in January 2020, we were shown the film Re:Tension and introduced to the accompanying toolkit developed by Ricardo Barker and Syra Shakir. Ricardo has extensive experience working in the film industry working for both ITV and BBC and is now a Senior Professional Practice Fellow in Media at Leeds Trinity University, Syra is a Associate Professor in the Institute for childhood and education also at Leeds Trinity University and is a qualified social worker, her background is professional, front-line practice with communities for over 18 years.

As a result of these introductions, it occurred to me that these could be utilised within my lessons could help to improve the message we were trying to convey to the apprentices.

### **About The Film and the Toolkit**

The film examines the topic of institutional racism within British Higher Education institutions and raises the issues faced by the BAME (Black, Asian, Minority and Ethnic) student community.

It follows a specific day in the life of the character, Thapelo, who at the start of the film has a conversation about his future plans with his colleague and how he doesn't want to apply for promotion within the company they both work at, the reason being that Thapelo is a bright student studying at University, and indicates that in the long term is hoping for a successful career elsewhere so subsequently wants to concentrate on his studies.

However, the rest of the day does not go to plan and Thapelo reflects on the morning's conversation and observes and analyses events which occur during the day, resulting in Thapelo questioning the actions of his fellow students, tutors and other staff members at the University.

The toolkit, developed Syra Shakir in collaboration with Ricardo focuses on the film and provides a framework which encourages a group to discuss what they have observed, discuss their feelings and their own experiences as well as exploring accountability and responsibility. The toolkit uses a theoretical model known as 'The Forced Silence' and refers to two of the principles of Critical Race theory.

After reviewing these resources for myself, I felt there was correlation between the Higher Education Institutions and the apprentice's place of work so felt that these could be adapted and incorporated into the training material which would be delivered to the apprentices during induction and their first Integrated Degree Apprenticeship Module [Starting Your Apprenticeship Learning Portfolio](#).

The apprentices are first introduced to the topic of EDI and the protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act of 2010 which include: - Age; Disability ; Gender reassignment ; Marriage and civil partnership ; Race ; Religion or belief ; Sex ; Sexual orientation (2).

We then reinforce WHY this topic is vital, it isn't tokenistic or a bolt on because we have been told we have to do it. The idea is that we move away from the generic 'online' EDI

training course which you have to complete every year which HR may have bought from a training provider, and we introduce and encourage an atmosphere of openness and transparency to the group which enables us to share experiences and actions which either blatantly or subtly highlight inequalities within the workplace and society.

So this is done by using the resources to focus on Race inequality, ensuring that new apprentices are aware that this is only part of a wider picture when thinking about EDI

The film is presented to the apprentices, and they are asked to *observe* what they see closely and try and take as many notes as they can. Once finished, they are divided in to groups to participate in an activity which promotes group discussion and is based on a reflective approach.

**Step 1** is obviously the *observation* of the film and encourages the apprentices to observe the events which are taking place in the film.

**Step 2** requires the groups to *analyse* what has been observed and they are directed to discuss their answers to various questions which are provided:

- *Describe certain scenes within the film, the reactions of the characters and what are the apprentices' thoughts?* This enables the apprentices to discuss their different viewpoints and appreciations of what has happened to Thapelo in the film.

This is possibly the most important step in the process, comments from the group include : -

- it has opened their eyes to how others may experience certain situations which they have not experienced themselves
- they have witnessed such events and did not realise the impact it can have on others
- have had this experience themselves and have not felt confident to do anything about it as they didn't want to disturb the status quo
- I certainly will try and take more care in future ensuring that my actions are consistent

**Step 3** requires the groups to consider what *action* is required so questions include:

- *What is your organisation doing to tackle racial harassment and discrimination in the workplace?*

- *Have you suffered any discrimination yourself?*

This enables the apprentice again to share any instances they themselves may feel they have been discrimination themselves in their workplace as well as enabling apprentices to share what policies, procedures their organisations may have in place to handle such situations or complaints if any

Step 4 enables the apprentices to evaluate what has been discussed and what they can take away from the session: -

- *What recommendations could you make to improve your organisation's EDI policies,* this will result from discussions in step 2 and 3 where apprentices talk about what their own organisations have in place.
- *What will you do differently as an individual and with your team in the workplace?* The intention here is that many may have learnt not to be so passive and positively challenge any negative attitudes and unreasonable behaviour which could be deemed as discriminatory.

On completion of this specific learning activity, we suggested that in their own time they use this reflective approach to consider other aspects of EDI in a similar way and consider the remaining protected characteristics.

### **Testing the apprentice's learning**

After the induction event has taken place and to enable us to assess that the lessons were beneficial, the module assessment which the apprentices were expected to complete as part of this first module was modified to ensure the results of the activity were captured.

The assessment is made up of two components: -

- Component 1 requires the apprentice to produce a learning plan which illustrates to their employer and the University the activities and learning opportunities they intend to conduct within their workplace which should result in them being able to meet the required knowledge, skills and behaviours which are being targeted during that first year.

- Component 2 tests the apprentice's ability to reflect on learning which took place during those first sessions by producing specific learning journals which documents the reflection on the learning event and also narrates artefacts of evidence which have been gathered to prove what the apprentice has learnt.

In respect to component 2, one of the topics which the apprentices were asked to cover was their learning in respect to EDI, the title being : -

*'Produce a 1000-word Reflective Portfolio Learning Journal entry entitled 'Your learning with regards to Equality and Diversity, Safeguarding, Prevent and British Values'. Within this journal you should reflect on the lessons delivered during this module and any policies and procedures which are in place relating to this legislation within your organisation, is there anything which can be improved?'*

This provided us with evidence which we could demonstrate to all regulatory bodies that the topic was covered with the apprentices and also provided me the opportunity to test the approach which I had chosen to adopt and the impact it had.

What was the impact of the learning?

The assessment demonstrated to me that the session had an impact on the apprentices.

Quotes from the journals which were submitted by the apprentices include : -

*'Within the session we watched an extremely thought provoking video, which was created by lecturer Ricardo Barker, called 'RE:TENSION' [15]. The 18 minute video silenced the room, as it was extremely thought provoking and made me think about perspectives.'* Apprentice A

*'Although I'm not a manager at 'organisation name', when I do progress, I will ensure my team take part in the cultural events to ensure they fully understand equality and diversity. I will communicate to them so they are aware bullying and discrimination is not tolerated and ensure they know where they can go to for support.'* Apprentice B

*'I come from a very working-class background which often supports the unfair treatment of others based on several different characteristics, that specifically of race. From a young age I have been disappointed with how people deem it acceptable to treat others differently based on characteristics in which are totally immaterial.'* Apprentice C

*‘Unfortunately, I am not proud to say that there are some forms of discrimination I have never spoken up about, either due to a lack of awareness or simply not seeing it as my place. As a strong advocate for equality, I was glad to see that there is more I can do to play a more active role in making the world a fairer place for all’* Apprentice D

Other quotes from the apprentices demonstrate that they have taken some positive decisive action as a result of the session including :-

*‘I have submitted a request to the university to ask if I am able to share the video ‘Re:Tension’ internally within my organisation’* Apprentice A

*‘I have already volunteered to become a Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) champion at Wincanton’* Apprentice E

*‘I want to encourage diversity, equality within my organisation. I am part of an employee forum, elected by the team. We are due to recruit new representatives and I have began discussing with HR how we can promote applications from BAME backgrounds. There will be a huge benefit to having a more diverse forum as we represent such a diverse team.’* Apprentice A

*‘I have made a formal request to join the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Awareness Group, which is an internal focus group at my business.’* Apprentice D

These quotes help to demonstrate that the approach adopted to tackle this area has helped in some ways empower apprentices, helping them to recognise how they should behave and empowering them to challenge issues of inequality both in the workplace and society.

### **Next steps**

Leeds Trinity University offer a half-day online session delivered by Syra Shakir and Ricardo Barker.

Following the screening of Re:Tension (run time: 20 minutes), Syra and Ricardo will begin the aftermath debate. The audience will be split into groups with opportunities to discuss the film, how it made them feel and feedback to the group and attendees will be encouraged to share personal experiences and reflect on racial inequality in their



institutions. Each time the session is delivered, the team reflect on how it is received and make alterations to the toolkit to ensure it meets the needs of the audience.

They are also working with digital learning technology experts to implement an on line toolkit which should also be available soon.

There are also investigations underway as to how films can be used to help engage learners in other topics and hopefully challenge the norm.

To enquire about using the film and the toolkit with a view to delivering this to your own staff and learners, or if you have other ideas as to how the concept can be adapted in other areas, please email Syra and Ricardo at the email addresses below.

## References

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