

TCNJ DOCU-STORY

Project Related Activities FACILITATOR'S GUIDE



What is the TCNJ Docu-Story?

In 2017, a Data Summit project was funded through a strategic initiative grant to contextualize a national discussion on the achievement gap in the TCNJ community. The project attempted to draw on objective data sets to better understand the disparities that occurred between demographic groups that led some to view the gap through opportunistic lenses. The good news is that a viable discussion was indeed started on our campus. However, the bad news is that the discussion tended to be highly impersonal since it essentially focused on numbers and data sets.

The TCNJ-Docu-Story is an attempt to humanize the discourse by adding faces and voices to the data. Although we may all share a common space called TCNJ, the reality of the matter is, there can be huge variations in the ways in which we perceive and interpret that space. The Docu-Story seeks to capture the voices of those who may not typically be heard through our traditional TCNJ channels (i.e. student government, class participation, etc.).

Rationale

If someone asked you to describe your “TCNJ experience” – how would you characterize the multiple exchanges you have on a daily basis? What images come to mind when you reflect on the thousands of micro-experiences that constitute your “TCNJ story”? Many would suggest that the world we perceive is for the most part, the image we construct in our minds. That is, what we have learned to look for in situations determines mostly what we see. How we “see” the world contributes to a set of ideas and assumptions that we carry in our heads to help us understand and navigate our day to day experiences. To this end, is it possible that different groups have different TCNJ stories? More specifically, do different demographic groups have different perceived experiences at TCNJ? Are there any thematic similarities in the various stories? The purpose of the TCNJ-Docu-Story is to provide a forum to explore these questions in terms of how they may impact the worldview of the various stakeholders on our campus.

Format of the Project

A call went out to students to invite volunteers to participate in an interview project to discuss their perceptions of the “TCNJ experience”. Over a two-day period, both audio and video responses were solicited from the various TCNJ stakeholders. A series of questions were utilized to allow the respondents to both directly and indirectly speak to their “TCNJ experience”. The two-day recording sessions yielded approximately 40 hours of responses. The project coordinators attempted to identify thematic strands that ultimately resulted in the various Docu-Story “Chapters”.

Using the TCNJ-Docu-Story

The TCNJ Docu-Story is designed to be an interactive experience that builds on video-taped interviews with current students discussing their perceptions of the campus experience. The Docu-Story experience introduces users to potentially a different reality than the one they currently know. To enhance the value of the Docu-Story experience, users should be willing to engage in the various reflective activities that address a range of biased based beliefs premised on social identities. In other words, The Docu-Story is not intended to be a “one and done” experience – instead, it is should be the beginning of a process that will lead to a form of equity-mindedness.

While quite obviously, one can view the Docu-Story on an individual basis, the true value of the experience lies in engaging others in a frank discussion about their respective reality. Learning is achieved by interacting with others to better understand how implicit bias, micro-aggressions, and notions of “color-blindness” impacts our lived reality. Simply put, “the debriefing” is the “secret sauce” for the Docu-Story and all of the suggested activities. If users omit “the sauce” the experience will be qualitatively different.

Word of Caution

The Docu-Story is **not** intended to represent the “TCNJ experience” of *all* students from any specific demographic group. Anyone viewing or “using” this product should do so in the limited context of “this is how *some* students perceive their college experience”. The purpose of this project is to raise awareness of the multiple concurrent realities and to focus on equity-mindedness at the institutional level.

TCNJ-Docu-Story Suggested Activity

Activity 1: What Do You Think?

A number of scholars agree, that encouraging student reflexivity is a core tenant of social justice education (Bozalek, Carolissen, Leibowitz, Nicholls, Rohleder & Swartz, 2010; Smele, Siew-Sarju, Chou, Breton & Bernhardt, 2017; Zembylas, 2012). Reflexivity is broadly understood as the ability to consider one's own feelings, reactions, and motives and how they impact behaviors. In the context of the Docu-Story, reflexivity suggests the ability to critically evaluate one's own social location and racial socialization, to become increasingly aware of racial biases, and to be willing to investigate the ways internal perspectives about race inform our interactions and relationships.

For this activity participants will work first individually and next with a partner.

Step 1: Individually, consider for a moment the TCNJ environment. That is, is this a place that you would consider recommending to a close friend or loved one? As you reflect on the academic and social campus environment generate several brief descriptors that in your opinion best describes life at TCNJ. (5 minutes)

Step 2: Discuss your list with your partner and try to refine your brief descriptions to “stand alone” statements. That is, collaborate with your partner to generate statements that can stand alone; free of explanation.

Step 4: View the 17-minute introduction to the TCNJ Docu-Story

Step 5: Individually, based solely on the comments in the video, generate several descriptors that you think best represents the perceptions of the individuals in the video.

Step 6: Confer with your partner and generate a list of descriptors that best represents the perceptions of the video participants.

Step 7: Work with your partner to generate a Venn Diagram of the statements you and your partner generated in Step 2 with your Step 6 projected perceptions of the video participants. Include any duplicate or overlapping statements in the intersecting area of the diagram.

Step 8: If completing this activity in a virtual setting, ask participants to “share” their screen. If the activity is being conducted in an actual classroom, conduct a quick walk of the room to determine if other pairs share or conflict with your perceptions of the campus. Did other pairs share or conflict with your perception of the video participants? Do you notice any patterns or anomalies? What preliminary conclusions are you able to draw from this process?

Step 9: If you were in a decision-making role, suggest one decision you would advocate based on your observations.

TCNJ-Docu-Story Suggested Activity

Activity 2: Everyone Has a Story

Step 1: The Docu-Story interviews are categorized into ten themes. Ask participants to identify a specific theme and view the interviews in the selected category.

Step 2: After viewing, make note of any comments that resonated with you; confirmed or challenged your beliefs or raised issues.

Step 3: Recruit two friends to separately watch the interviews in your selected thematic category.

Step 4: Briefly note their reactions to the interviews. Did they tend to agree, conflict or raise specific questions?

Step 5: Based on this small sample of friends, what conclusions would you draw about TCNJ?

Step 6: Based on the conclusions you reached (Step 5), suggest one recommendation that you would propose to someone in a leadership role at TCNJ. Use Flipgrid app to share your recommendation.

TCNJ-Docu-Story Suggested Activity

Activity 3: Person of Interest

Step 1: In this activity, you are working with a partner. Announce to the group that 30 students took part in this interview experience. The facilitator will show the group a thumbnail image of all 30 students. Next, as the facilitator scroll through the various students, ask the participants to “Select one person who “interest” you”.

Step 2: Using whatever criteria you want – offer 1-3 words to describe why you selected this person.

Step 3: Meet with your partner and share your initial thoughts about your selection. Specifically, “What do you think this person will say about TCNJ?”.

Step 4: Explain that you are going to hear the person they selected discuss their perceptions of life at TCNJ. However, before you view your “person of interest” - Turn to your partner and briefly discuss, “What do you anticipate the selected person will say about TCNJ?”. Each person should take brief notes about what their partner said. Also indicate if you agree/disagree with your partner’s projection.

Step 5: Watch the interview for your selected person and make special note: Did he/she say anything that confirmed your belief? Surprise you?

Step 6: Have your partner watch “your interview” – and respond: “Did they say anything that confirmed the projected beliefs, surprise you?”

Step 7: Partners meet and debrief

Step 8: As a whole group, discuss the descriptor words. Discuss any commonalties in confirmed beliefs, surprises? What did you learn?

Step 9: As a group ask: “If the experiences of the students in the Docu-Story are typical of a respective demographic group at TCNJ, what does this say about the College?”

Step 10: Ask: “If you were in a decision-making role, suggest one decision you would advocate based on this activity?”.

TCNJ-Docu-Story Suggested Activity

Activity 4: “But I don’t See Color” - Understanding Implicit Bias and Micro Aggressions

Step 1: Begin by discussing the following definition of Implicit Bias:

- *The unconscious attribution of particular qualities to a member of a certain social group, implicit stereotypes are shaped by experiences and based on learned associations between particular qualities and social categories*

Step 2: Emphasize the point, that “We all have implicit cognitions that help us function. The same implicit cognitions function when we interact with people – we assign to social categories.”

Step 3: Watch the following 3 minute New York Times video:

- <https://www.nytimes.com/video/us/100000004818663/peanut-butter-jelly-and-racism.html>

Step 4: Ask: Did you hear anything that you: Agree with; Disagree with; Find interesting; Find confusing.

Step 5: Share the following characteristics of Implicit Bias and discuss possible implications on a college campus:

- *Implicit biases are pervasive. Everyone possesses them, even people with avowed commitments to impartiality such as Judges and Educators*
- *The implicit associations we hold do not necessarily align with our declared beliefs or even reflect stances we would explicitly endorse.*
- *We generally tend to hold implicit biases that **favor our own in-group**, though research has shown that we can still hold implicit biases against our in-group*

Step 6: Discuss the concept of Micro-Aggression as coined by psychiatrist Chester Pierce, M.D., in the 1970s. Dr. Pierce, emeritus professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical, described micro-aggressions as the “The subtle, stunning and often automatic and non-verbal exchanges which are ‘put downs.’”. For additional discussions about this concept see:

Derald Wing Sue’s book “Micro- Aggressions in Everyday Life”; and/or

Robin DiAngelo’s discussion of the “Good/Bad Binary” in her book, “White Fragility”

Step 7: Watch the following 15 minute TED Talk

https://www.ted.com/talks/melody_hobson_color_blind_or_color_brave?language=en

Step 8: Ask: Is the incident in the hotel a case of Implicit Bias or a Micro Aggression? Explain your answer.

Step 9: Compare discussions of the TCNJ Docu-Story with Hobson's notion of "Being comfortable with being uncomfortable".

Step 10: Ask: "Have you ever indicated that you were "color-blind"? Explain why the term is not appropriate.

Step 11: Watch the interviews in the "Stereotypes" thematic section of the TCNJ Docu-Story and discuss the various comments using the concepts of "Implicit Bias" and "Micro-Aggressions".

Step 12: Ask: "If you were in a decision-making role, suggest one decision you would advocate based on this activity".