Exploring Online Experiences of Young People in Rural Areas

Fatimah Awan & David Gauntlett

Research Fellow   Professor of Media
                         and Communications

University of Westminster

IAMCR Conference
18-22 July 2010

Young people's creative understanding of their mediaworlds

- Year 10 students (age 14-15) from schools in Newcastle, Manchester, London, Southampton, Christchurch and Cumbria.
- Asked to create identity boxes using metaphors to express their identity and the place of media in their lives.

Exploring methodologies

- Our previous work with creative methods had demonstrated the importance of:
  - Making an artefact
  - … in a process involving *time* and *reflection*
  - … which participants can subsequently explain and discuss

Exploring methodologies

- Especially valuable aspects of the process:
  - Taking time
  - Making with the hands
  - Presenting something whole
  - Using metaphors

Exploring methodologies

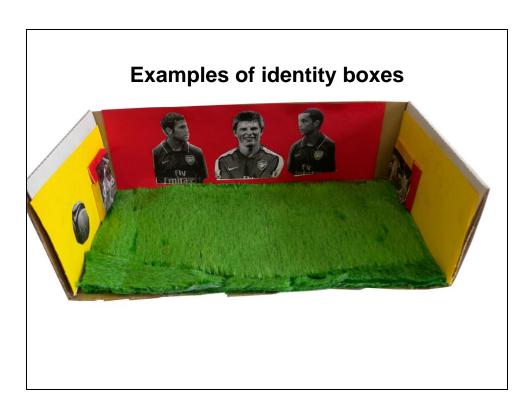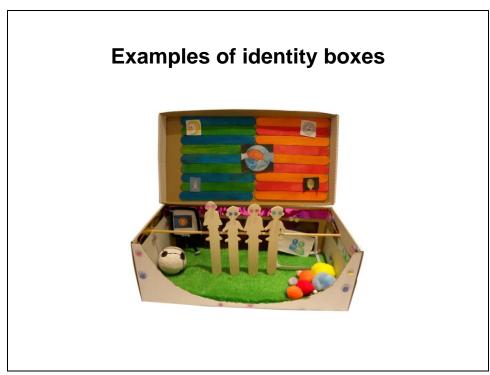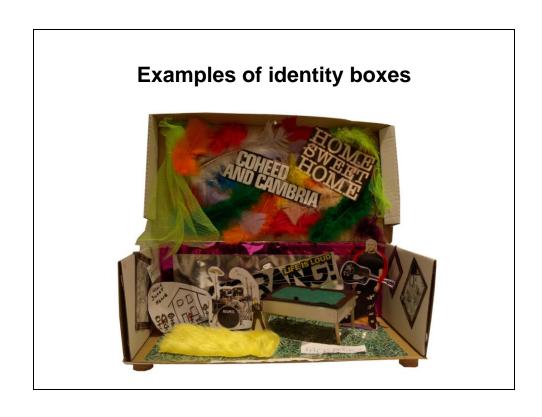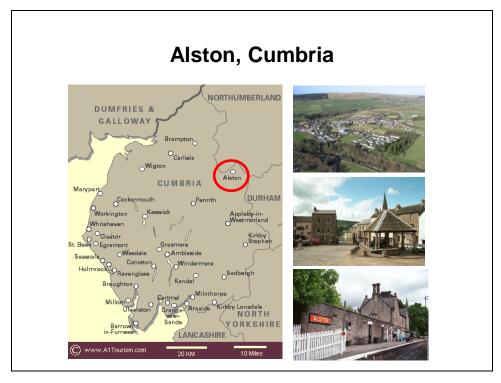- Previous experience with Lego (construction bricks) . . .

Examples of identity boxes

Fatimah Awan and David Gauntlett 2010 (p. 3)

Examples of identity boxes

Examples of identity boxes

Examples of identity boxes

Alston, Cumbria

Fatimah Awan and David Gauntlett 2010 (p. 5)

Alston Cybermoor project

- Connect rural communities to the world wide web
  - Every household in Alston given a free PC and internet connection (limited period)
  - Offered practical training on how to use the internet
- Encourage more people to utilise the internet for public services
- Provide fast broadband internet connections to households
- Encourage people to acquire new skills through distance learning

Alston Cybermoor project

Fatimah Awan and David Gauntlett 2010 (p. 6)

Findings

- Traditional media

  - Television functions as a tool for communication with family and friends

  - Television viewing seen as a passive activity

  - Low cinema attendance

  - Few magazines read, regarded as too costly

  - Books are seen as an indicator of intelligence

  - Music is a very popular activity and used to articulate own 'authentic' feelings, emotions and experiences

Findings

- New media
  - Social networking websites used as a tool for communication with family and friends
  - Disengagement with the internet/computers:

    Interviewer: So it sounds like you don't actually use the computer that much.

    Khloe: Not much, not really. I used to, like when I first got it I'd be on it like every night, all night, but the novelty's worn off, it's just boring now.

  - Outdoor activities preferred
  - Create own social spaces and need to feel physical connection with others

Findings

- Preservation of rural culture:

  Gerrard: But some people will come out and, you know, and they'll come to the Dale and they'll state their views and they try to change our culture.

  Like I think the ban on hunting is completely wrong, but people from inner cities, they just said 'oh, hunting's wrong because it's all inhumane', but it's *our* culture, why should we stop our culture?

  And we don't tell them what to do in the cities. *We* don't get a say.

Findings

- For many, media has little relevance in their lives:

  Interviewer:
  But does the media [have any relevance]//
  Gerrard:
  //erm, not really, not in my, not in my big world, not in my bigger picture, you know.

Findings

- Connection problems and 'slowness':

  Interviewer: Did you get one [computer]?
  Rowan: Yeah, they're really rubbish ...
  Yeah, well they are about four years old now
  but they're really rubbish. They're like the worst
  network ever because it just like constantly
  doesn't work.

Findings

- Internet compounds feelings of isolation:

  Interviewer: When you see things on the internet, like
  concerts in London or fashion shows, does it make you
  feel closer to it or do you feel more isolated?
  Danielle: More isolated. Just like because there's
  nothing like that where we are, up like round here.

- Online identity is 'true self'

- Two different worlds

Fatimah Awan and David Gauntlett 2010 (p. 9)

In conclusion

- Not just about the issue of access, but about making young people understand *how* and *why* new media technologies are *relevant* to their lives.

- Academic research community and practitioners must consider how new media technologies can be used to improve the conditions of young people's lives.

Further information

- www.artlab.org.uk