![trails: Teaching Resources and Innovations Library for Sociology]

Using Virtual Reality to Learn about Place

Julia Waity, Samantha Durham

May 14, 2020

SUGGESTED CITATION

When using resources from TRAILS, please include a clear and legible citation

Abstract

While being able to read data correctly is a vital skill, many sociology classes rely heavily on charts, graphs and tables that can be overwhelming and disengaging for students. One way to overcome this is for students to see firsthand the concept that they are learning about. Because it is not always possible for students to physically travel to the place that they are learning about, virtual reality can provide a simulation of these places.

The virtual reality activity described here was used in a 200 level poverty studies course to teach students about geographic variations in poverty. It can easily be adapted to other sociology courses where geographic concepts are taught, such as globalization. Through this experiential learning activity, students can view poverty "firsthand" with the use of virtual reality technology. Students work in small groups to explore areas of the world that experience high rates of poverty via Google Earth. As students engage in the activity, they take notes on their ideas and findings for each location they view. Once all of the students have completed the activity, the class ends with a group discussion of what they learned about geographic variations in poverty. This activity challenges students to use information learned in previous weeks of class

to analyze places facing poverty around the world.

Details

Subject Areas: Visual Sociology

Resource Types: Class Activity

Class Levels: Any Level

Class Sizes: Small

Usage Notes

Usage Notes

Instructions

We conducted this activity in a 200-level course called poverty studies, which is an elective for sociology majors but also fulfills two general education requirements, so most of the students were not sociology majors. While poverty itself might be well known to the students, it is possible that this is the first time they have considered poverty from a sociological standpoint. Thus, it is important to teach students about poverty in a way that looks beyond preconceived ideas and from a sociological point of view.

This activity was designed to be interactive for students but also allow them to visualize some of the topics they have learned about in class. Some of these topics might include food deserts, lack of public transportation such as bus stops, or poor neighborhood upkeep. This activity also allows student to interact with each other through viewing different locations and sharing their thoughts on what they see through the virtual reality technology.

In the class before the virtual reality activity, students should start thinking about spatial inequalities. Lead a discussion on how students think poverty may vary by location, or whatever the place based topic is that you will be exploring.

In the class where they will be completing the activity, begin by dividing them into groups based on the size of your class and the amount of virtual reality equipment available. In our situation, the virtual reality equipment was provided by the university's library in the library's digital makerspace. We had enough equipment that four pairs of students could participate in the virtual reality experience at the same time.

Learning Goals and Assessments

LEARNING GOALS

1. By completing this activity, students will demonstrate an understanding of how poverty can appear different around the world.

2. By completing this activity, students will be able to discuss conditions of poverty and how they may impact the individuals living in the area.

3. By completing this activity, students will be able to demonstrate reflection skills and apply previously discussed materials to new activities.

ASSESSMENTS

1. Students will fill out a worksheet that requires them to critically think and describe the variations or similarities they find from each location they view through the virtual reality simulation.

2. Students will be required to discuss with the class their findings from the activity and critically describe how these conditions could be impacting those living in the area.

3. Students will explain in class discussion how previously discussed materials from class apply to the areas they viewed in the virtual reality simulation.

Resource Files

DOCX
DOCX