Additional Practical Guidance For The Management of Online Creative Projects for Children and Young People

Introduction

Right now groups all over the world that organise projects and programmes for children and young

Steps to Creating a Welcoming and Safe On-line Environment

It is important to create an online environment in which individuals can collaborate and interact in a positive and affirming way.

Create an online Group Contract

When working with any group of young people it will be important to ask for their input so that everyone understands the importance of a Group Conduct. This can be written in an agreed format that everyone is comfortable with. The contract does not need to be over complex; it can simply be a set of guidelines created by the group that all participants sign off on. Your group may already have a group contract, and if so, you may only need to discuss and agree some extra provisions that are particular to on-line activity.

Examples of typical behaviour encouraged in a group contract includes:

- Using welcoming and inclusive language
- Being respectful of differing viewpoints and experiences
- Gracefully accepting constructive criticism
- Focusing on what is best for the overall group
- Showing empathy towards other members

In an on-line context group members should give greater consideration to listening more and not speaking over each other. This will be particularly noticeable with larger groups. Visual cues and group management techniques we usually use won't be as effective on-line; communication is more complex and so ground rules in how to do this will need to be established and followed. Some platforms have a facility to raise hands - participants could raise their real hands of course! Only contributing when prompted by the group leader might be helpful. Hosting and online workshop can make interpersonal interactions seem cold. Eye contact with your learners is essential, make your group members feel at ease.

Schedule and content

Create realistic and accessible expectations. Clearly communicate when meetings will happen, how and when invitations will be issued, reminding participants of the objectives and outcomes for the project, guidance about attendance and participation.

Whereas a conventional workshop might last a couple of hours and include a break, the same on-line workshop will be shorter and won't have any breaks. Conversely, preparation for a workshop or workshop series may be more complex involving the pre-recording of videos or other presentations or resources. So your traditional two-hour workshop might now comprise of a 30-minute meet-up where members are introduced to other prepared resources, which are then worked with by members independently before returning for a further on-line meet-up.

In the early days of working like this, the amount of preparation and consideration required will be considerable.

Practice makes perfect - Run a test meeting, practice transitions between breakout groups, sharing screens and whole group discussions. Check that you know how to communicate with all your students together and individually via your platform's chat function.

Digital Platforms and Set-Up

Having appropriate lighting can be the difference between your group seeing you or your shadow. Good audio is critical too. Check that your audio is up to spec through test calls. If possible, secure an external microphone and be sure to slow down the pace of your intervention.

Be conscious that some of your participants may be hard of hearing. Here are some tips on how to make online learning accessible for deaf students. If your online class platform does not generate captions, you can save the videos to a private YouTube channel and generate free automatic captions there. Make liberal use of the mute function to reduce background noise or the dreaded echo chamber, and remind your members to do the same.

Consider organising your online project to take up less bandwidth to be inclusive of participants who have weaker online connections. Or combine methods so that difficulties for members with weaker connections are minimised.
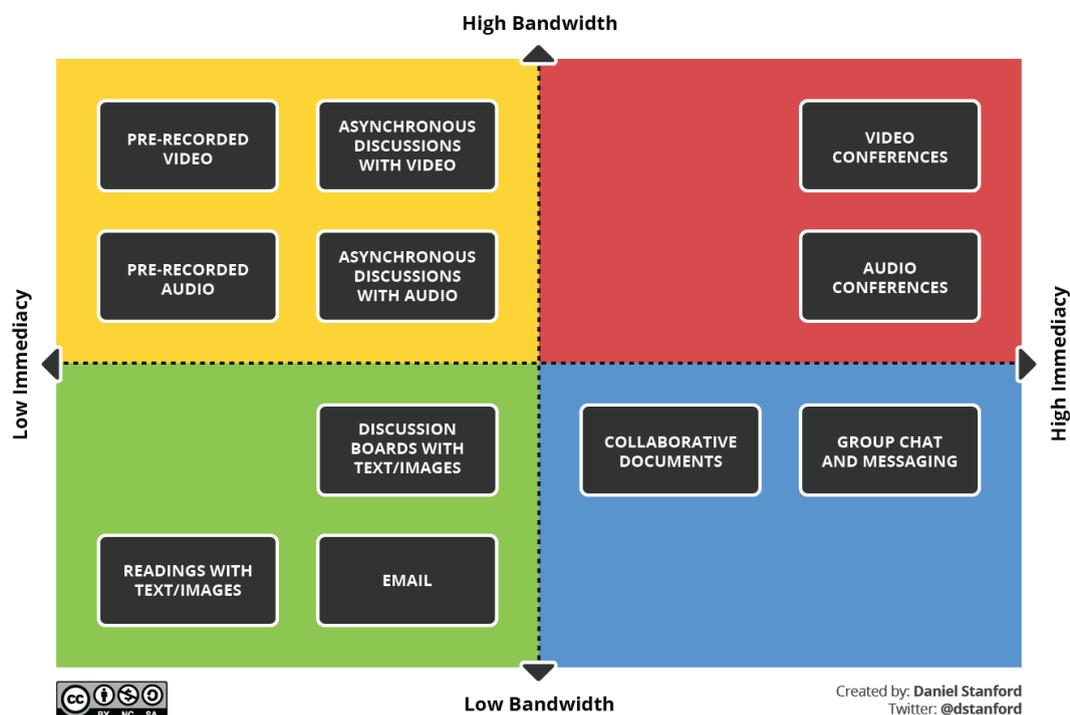
We have collated a directory of some of the more common platforms currently being utilised. Zoom has become the platform of choice for many groups and while security concerns appear to have been remedied, it still requires you to have first downloaded the app to your device whereas other platforms will work through your internet browser. For video discussions with little fuss but no tools, WhatsAp is very versatile. From Facebook and Google to Slackchat and Youtube, there are many tools at your disposal. Experiment with a few of them and choose the ones that suit you best.

Additional Child Protection Measures

All of the measures included in your child protection policy and procedures also apply when working on-line. In a conventional workshop, two adults who have been vetted appropriately should manage and ensure a safe environment for the group. The on-line context should not differ. Artists and other group leaders managing projects should also, at a minimum, have completed Tusla's Children First E-Learning Programme.

In an on-line meeting, as with a physical workshop, the leaders should be the first to enter the virtual room and should be the last to leave. You may wish to set up break out rooms for smaller groups of young people to work together. As with a physical workshop where leaders should avoid situations where they are with a single child, a leader should avoid being in a breakout

room with a single child and should avoid being the only adult in a breakout room with any number of children for extended periods.

Projects and programmes will likely require different types of communication between leaders and members on a continual basis – members submitting work for consideration, leaders providing individual direction etc. Insofar as possible it is advisable to use group chats for these purposes such as Slack or a closed Facebook group. Leaders should not use their own personal email accounts to communicate with members. As an alternative leaders could set up a specific gmail account for the project that all leaders have access to.

Because activities are wholly on-line, the potential for members to share material or make comments concerning another member outside the group without their consent is much greater. Being internet based, these are harder to erase, harder to escape from, and can cause much hurt and anxiety. While this must be a strong theme in the Group Contract, leaders should be particularly attentive to its potential and react quickly should they have any concerns.

Parental Consent and GDPR

The General Data Protection Regulation (or GDPR) is a change in legislation on how we use and store personal data. All organisations must be compliant with the new rules. Personal data refers to information that can, directly or indirectly, identify a real person. This includes information such as: a name, an email address, posts on social networking sites, medical information, bank details, a photo or an IP address.

Parents should sign consent forms that gives permission for their child to participate in a project or activity. To comply with GDPR legislation such forms should also describe how personal data will be gathered, shared, used or stored in the course of the project and afterwards.

Any data that is collected or retained should be justifiable and essential to the successful operation of the project. In particular, recordings of meetings should only be made when deemed necessary to the success of the project, and only then with the prior informed consent of those present. Members should not make their own recordings of meetings.

The Member's Environment

For on-line projects the conventional workshop space crosses over with the domestic and as such brings with it some additional considerations. Members must be appropriately dressed. While pyjamas are sometimes worn for extensive periods at home, members should arrive for an on-line activity as they would for any conventional workshop.

Always ensure the background is appropriate for meetings using camera. Members should ideally be in a non-private space in their house (i.e. not a bedroom). Be cognisant of other people in the household. As well as protecting the member's privacy, each member and their parent should ensure that other household members do not disrupt the meeting; more importantly that they cannot be heard to use inappropriate language or seen to be dressed inappropriately. Some platforms allow participants to blur the background, which can be useful. Depending on the age of the member and the nature of the workshop a parent/appropriate adult may supervise the meeting throughout. At a minimum the space should be such that a parent/appropriate adult can and does supervise the workshop intermittedly.

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Despite dropouts in coverage, awkward frozen faces and competition amongst family members for access to the internet, technology has proven to be an essential lifeline at this time and will likely be a more important and useful tool into the future. As such it is more important than ever that we all learn how to create better and safer online environments for young people to explore their creativity.

Useful Resources - www.webwise.ie www.tusla.ie www.youth.ie