COME2ART: Introducing a collaborative scheme between artists & community members fostering life skills development and resilience through creative placemaking

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Erasmus + project, Partnerships for Creativity

"A life skills curriculum through arts

in the context of creative placemaking

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Module 4

Collaborate with others in artistic projects, promoting collective efforts and shared understanding

Introduction

The LifeComp conceptual framework of the European Commission clusters Collaboration together with Empathy and Communication under the Social Area. According to the framework, Collaboration means to engage in group activity and teamwork acknowledging and respecting others.

Collaboration is one of the 21st century key skills to be able to lead a better life and it is teachable.

Module 4 is composed by two units:

Unit 4.1: Rethinking what collaborating means

The first Unit will introduce participants to the basics notions of collaboration, starting from a reflection on Empathy and active listening.

This unit includes:

- Frameworks and tools that they can be used and applied for the community members to upskill their collaboration competence
- How to anticipate and overcome conflicts.

Unit 4.2: Collective practises in the artistic enviroment

The second Unit will introduce participants to interesting case studies and methods for effective collaboration. As highlighted from the research the collaborative and social dimension of the creative practices should be nurtured so that youngsters and community members feel part of a larger group of people sharing the same values and purpose. This will allow them to reconnect with their openness and ability to communicate.

This Unit includes the following practises:

- The ACED model: a blueprint for change
- The SCRATCH method at the Battersea Arts Center

The main learning objectives of this Module are:

● Knowledge and application of the notion of empathy and active listening

● Description of tools and framework to understand and improve collaboration skills

● Tips and tricks to have better conversations online

● Description of case studies based on collaboration with community members

In line with these skills, training materials under Units 4.1 and 4.2 are aimed at achieving these main learning outcomes:

• Define at least 1 element of empathy

• Indicate at least 1 key aspect of a collaboration

• Apply active listening

• Experiment at least 1 exercise to exercise empathy

• Design one art project based on collaboration

• Identify what is the audience centred experience design (ACED)

• Describe the SCRATCH method

• Identify at least 3 key learning points from the Creative People and Places program.

Unit 4.1: *Re-thinking what collaborating means*

Introduction

As one of the 21st century key skills to be able to thrive, collaboration is defined as the ability "to engage in group activity and teamwork acknowledging and respecting others". Closely linked to empathy and communication, the capacity to create and guide a collaborative environment is essential to any creative process based on group dynamics.

Collaboration is about getting in relation to someone else, exercising empathy, active listening and the disposition to embrace sharing perspectives and co-designing ideas.

Understanding empathy

Effective collaboration is fueled by empathy, defined as "the understanding of another person's emotions, experiences and values, and the provision of appropriate responses". Empathy is intertwined with self-awareness or the ability to identify, label, and describe one's own emotions while recognizing, understanding and responding to emotions in others.

Often perceived as an innate quality or something that cannot be taught, it is interesting to reflect upon empathy considering that the UNESCO Working Group on Global Citizenship Education includes empathy among global citizenship competences. Empathy can be learnt and practiced. It is possible to empathise with someone, and still disagree with their attitudes or values. Hence it is essential to become aware of what emotions others ignite in us and how do we

choose to respond to them. It is about getting into someone else's shoes even if they are not comfortable. It means listening, comprehending, not judging, sometimes exposing ourselves, activating a connection and accepting other's point of views.

Empathy, for a group of people, means building something, starting from listening and building trust. To come up with truly creative ideas requires seeking a diversity of perspectives and creating a welcoming space for people to share their ideas without fear of judgment. Empathy is the key skill to unlock this. To build the capability for empathic collaboration, one can start by asking more questions, actively listening, assuming a curious mindset, and building on others' ideas.

Using active listening

Most of the people consider listening as a passive activity but listening actively is not just hearing what has been said, but it is a two-way process involving both sender and receiver skills. It is powerful tool to kick off and maintain collaboration: if we are listening, it is visible, if we are listened to we can establish a trusting, collaborative relationship because an active listener gives the gift of their full attention, providing the speaker the space to express himself.

However, people tend to listen and think at the same time, formulating a response to what the other person is saying or filtering out any information they feel is irrelevant (non-functional" listening). Anticipation and prejudice are common behaviors that can affect the ability to truly listen to someone and

prevent from seeing things from a new perspective. What leads to "non-functional" listening is the belief that we already know what the speaker is going to say. The most disruptive barrier to Active Listening is the distraction of the inner voice that preventively judges the other.
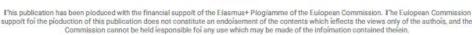
For this reason, being fully present is the first condition of active listening. It implies the process of being aware of our feelings and use them as "emotional" information about ourselves, our interlocutor and the content of his/her speech. Active listening is an enhanced, active state of listening that includes observing what a person's non-verbal messages are saying – the body messages – and the context.

It requires effort, self-awareness, and practice. It is a potent skill, because it allows a person to gain more insight and greater and untainted information. It enables to communicate better inside of a team, with other peers or with external stakeholders. By lowering our internal voices we can create a space of trust and respect. Active listening can help diffuse conflict and nurture collaboration.

Collaborate with others in artistic practices

Collaboration is engaging in group activity and teamwork acknowledging and respecting others. It brings a sense of shared accomplishment and the bonds among group members can help build caring relationships. It helps to fight negative psychological states such as depression, anxiety or repressed anger, fear of failure, hopelessness and meaninglessness. Positive interdependence, the possibility of relying on each other's efforts and promotive interaction (encouraging and facilitating each other's contributions) are key aspects of
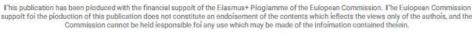
collaboration. But how can we make sure we are creating a proper context and environment for our group to collaborate? Here are some key aspects to supervise and control:

- Common purpose: it is important to set a clear goal for the collaboration that the group is developing. Everyone needs to know clearly what collaboration can bring.

- Playing to strengths: mapping the assets that the group brings to the table is an empowering exercise to strengthen the willingness to collaborate.

- Actions speak louder than words: rather than being involved in meetings, group members need to collaborate about strategies and action plans. Co-creation is a vital dimension for collaboration.

- Striking the right tone: communication is a key component of collaboration. In creating a collaborative environment accessibility of language and codes should be guaranteed and not taken for granted.

- Evidence: building commitment, it is important to work at collecting and sharing the results of collaboration, evidence can motivate and inspire the group and its legacy.

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Unit 4.2: *Collective practices in the creative environment*

Introduction

This Unit presents 3 selected collaborative practices to co-ideate, co-design and co-evaluate arts-based practices: the ACED model, the SCRATCH method, the Creative People and Places Collaborative evaluation framework. These 3 collective practices in creative contexts share a bottom-up approach where collaboration and inclusion are ensured by the adoption of methodologies such as human-centered approach, trial-error and double loop learning, design thinking that put people at the center of the creative process, be it during the creation, implementation or evaluation phase.
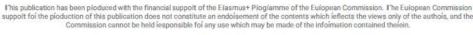
The ACED model: a blueprint for change

ACED – Audience-Centred Experience Design[1] is a collective practice format to help cultural organisations create experiences with and for their audiences, visitors or participants using a staged process that can help them make long term change.

It follows the principles of human centred design and is adapted to the way cultural organisations work, having been co-designed, tried and tested with organisations from around the world. It recognises that to be effective we need to be prepared to change ourselves and our organisations.

ACED is for cultural organisations interested in a model of intervention for improving their capacity to establish meaningful relationships with their audiences and communities. It works for large or small institutions in a range of artistic and cultural forms and different types of organisation. It can be adapted to

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[1] This text is an extract from "A Blueprint for Audience Centred Experience Design", a publication realized within the ADESTE+ project co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union

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different contexts and missions and become as diverse in practice as are the organisations which decide to take it on.

ACED is based on the needs of cultural organisations but is relevant and useful in different ways, for a range of purposes and roles:

- For the teams of cultural institutions it offers creative ways to use their talents to orient an offer around the needs of the public.
- For cultural leaders it can provide the basis for change that is transformative, delivers mission and enables teams.
- For trainers, consultants or facilitators it provides a new, but tried and tested way of helping an organisation to move forward.
- For policy makers it provides the inspiration and basis for the wider change the cultural sector needs.

ACED has been created to deliver fundamental and long term change. It requires a positive, optimistic perspective that gives proper attention to the experience of the audience, participant or user.
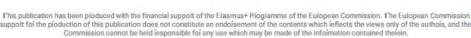
Audience Centred Experience Design therefore focuses both on what we need to do to meet audience needs and at the same time to facilitate change in the organisation to make this happen. It requires empathy, creativity, a real hands-on approach and a commitment to test, validate and adapt as necessary.

Three overall phases and eight stages:

GET READY/the preparation and starting points

1. Prepare/deciding if you are ready and what you want to do

2. Unfreeze/unlocking the organisation and setting up the process

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EXPERIMENT/the phase of thinking, considering and testing

3. Empathise/identify and understand your audience of interest

4. Define/clarify what you want to achieve

5. Ideate/create, imagine, think of what you might do to achieve this

6. Prototype/decide on the best solutions and test them out

7. Commit/evaluate what worked, refine, retry or adopt and amplify

8. Embed/embed the solution(s) and the new working practices in your work.

The ACED blueprint is an approach which can be adopted by all sorts of organisations in a range of contexts within the cultural sector. It has been developed within the Adeste+ project to address the issue of enabling wider and deeper participation and involvement of the public with cultural institutions.

To learn more about this format: aced.adesteplus.eu

The SCRATCH method at the Battersea Arts Center

The Battersea Arts Center in London describes itself as an institution that hosts welcoming and inclusive spaces where communities, artists and audiences can connect and be creative. Based in an iconic building with a radical history, this arts center aims to "give people the resources to develop artistic ideas that are bold and unconventional, and to put accessibility at the centre of everything they do"[2].

A characterizing element of the Battersea Arts Centre, which makes it internationally famous for the methodology of work adopted, is the so-called

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[2] https://bac.org.uk/

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"scratch method". This method is applied to everything Battersea achieves and produces, whether it is a new performative space or one show.

Scratch is a way for artists to share ideas and unfinished shows with audiences at an early stage and to get feedback. The method follows a simple process: when an artist or professional proposes an idea in draft form, before investing into it, Battersea develops it together with the public to collect their input. If an artist has an idea and the producers feel they want it give a chance (planning phase), a first draft performance of what the show will be like is organised, for example a 10 minutes show that is tested in front of an audience generally represented by the local community (phase of testing), for a minimum contribution of 2 or 3 pounds to collect written or oral feedback. The artist analyzes the feedback received together with the producer (analysis phase), a necessary time is taken into account to incorporate the feedback (time) and start the process again until the show is not complete.

Battersea Arts Centre's Scratch events derive from a rich history of experimentation and audience collaboration. By opening the arts center's doors and providing a creative platform for artists to experiment with their ideas, Battersea Arts Centre has given the opportunity to a lot of artists to develop their ideas into successful shows. Since 2006, the center has used Scratch in different contexts: to develop the building, to change their organisation, to develop new ideas by teachers and young entrepreneurs and to expand to the digital world.

Collective practices in less served areas: Creative People and Places

Creative People and Places is a national programme promoted by the Arts Council in England which that aims to increase arts participation in places where historically there have been fewer opportunities for people to get involved with arts and culture. The programme comprises a network of 21 independent projects across England, and there were three initial rounds of CPP funding from Arts Council England starting in 2012.

It funds consortium partners in eligible local authority areas to empower local people to decide what kind of creative activity they want to experience in their place. Each consortium must include at least one non-arts partner, and each CPP has created their own ten-year vision for their place. Teams of people have played a part in making Creative People and Places a success over the last 10 years: from the communities themselves, the organisations involved and the individual, often freelance, practitioners, all of whom have shown incredible commitment to the communities they work with.

The CPP program has been evaluated using a methodology based on a variety of sources: desk research, interviews, participatory techniques such as workshops, mapping exercises and audience voice group discussions with self-identified 'new' audiences. Here are some of the observations that the Arts Council has gathered after 10 years of running the Program[3]:

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[3] Source: *Mapping and analysis of engagement approaches across the Creative People and Places programme* by Sarah Boiling and Clare Thurman

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- The values and principles that lay behind efforts to engage more people with arts and culture have a big impact on how this work is then carried out, and how effective it is. For leaders, making these values visible in behaviours and practice feels like it is important.

- If the cultural sector expects audiences to change their behaviour we need to change first. We need to change philosophically in how we think of audiences and participants as creators and partners; we need to change what, where and when we programme; and we need to change how we find and communicate with audiences.

- Many of the practices stem from a belief that the arts are for 'ordinary' people. If we really want a broad range of people to engage with the arts we need to communicate in a way that speaks to a broad range of people, not in way that speaks only to other arts professionals, to experts and to critics.

- There are no shortcuts to genuine audience engagement. It takes a long time and it needs serious investment – it also requires people with patience, empathy, resilience, enthusiasm, vision, creativity and genuine warmth.

- Step away from the art. To make connections with people who don't think the arts are for them it's vital to work with non-arts partners, to use non-arts places and spaces, to connect with non-arts individuals and to use non-arts language.

- Whilst at the same time…It is important to create art that is meaningful and relevant to people; that speaks of their lives, their histories and their experiences. Not art that is bounded by these factors, but uses them as a starting point to tell engaging and amazing stories.