

IO5 – OAER3

Innovation in Creative Digital Youth Project Delivery: data verbalisation techniques

Poetry, Digital Storytelling, Animation, Graphic Design, Data Verbalisation





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Welcome and Introduction to the Resource:

Welcome to this resource, which is open access and free designed for all those working with young people in the continent of Europe and beyond. It is designed to provide youth workers and the broad European youth workforce with understandings, skills & opportunities to learn about, and work with, the most contemporary and inclusive methods of creative digital activities today. It outlines the use of online poetry, animation, storytelling, graphics and music, and data verbalisation (Glynn, 2019) and other exciting methods for youth activism. We argue in this toolkit that these methods challenge contemporary structures of knowledge, how we know, how we investigate the world and act to make change happen, working with young people. This resource, which offers a self (lone practitioner) or group development tool, is designed to help those who work with youth to innovate in their ways of communicating and delivering activism materials. It also helps you to think about how you can inspire participation and diverse youth activist using contemporary digital contexts and methods.

This open educational resource brings alive the key issues in the field and provides skills to you, helping you to engage and become more informed and involved in creative and digital youth work, no matter where you are starting from in terms of skills, experience, and ideas. Indeed, no experience of innovative creative methods in youth work will be assumed and the audience of the resource are introduced to several key areas that may be able to be deployed in their own contexts. These are not the only creative innovations available, of course, but the resource provides a starting point for youth workers to investigate further creative innovations and find new ways of developing practice. It challenges you to reflect upon and interrogate your own skills, practices and the creative promotion and delivery of digital activism.

The 'digital turn' in youth activism was becoming well established, even before the Covid pandemic created a stronger imperative to use online methods. The reality is that the digital breaks down barriers of time, global/national/regional/local distance, even – quite often - culture and difference, enabling greater inclusion in a wider range of new technological activities to be used in youth activism activities. The resource focuses upon examining these areas:

1. *Emancipatory poetry – using the digital delivery method and poetic means to address issues of importance in young people's lives.*
2. *Storytelling and digital storyboarding techniques.*
3. *animation, graphics & performance for youth engagement, social action, and change.*
4. *Graphic art approaches*
5. *Data verbalisation – using words, speech and performance with young people to get a message across around activism.*



Examples will be provided of youth workforce individuals, or organisations, who are at the cutting edge of supporting youth interventions using these practices digitally. This will include outlining the challenging contexts in which these have been deployed including with disaffected youth, and there is some coverage of situations of youth work with conflict and violence.

The educational resource will emphasise the emergent and fast-moving cultural space that youth workers need to engage with, understanding that collaborating with young people as co-producers in youth work, is the only way that the digitally engaged youth worker can keep up and meet the needs of youth, growing up in a fast-paced environment. The output will challenge youth workers and others to think about how meeting digital needs with these innovative approaches might require new affiliations and co-working with other youth workers and teams/ transnational approaches and teaming up with diverse stakeholders, such as the creative industries, performance NGOs or graphic design teams.

Lastly, the resource will challenge youth workers to examine how these new directions and ways of working can shape and positively change their own practice and organisations. This is a matter of changing cultures – which sounds much easier than it is. We use the words and experiences of youth workers from the five countries of the DigiSMARTs consortium, to find inspiration around how to begin to change culture towards creativity and innovation and sustain that direction of travel.

Learning Objectives

After studying and using this resource you will be able to:

1. Outline and explain some of the main ways that innovations, particularly digital innovations are shaping youth work and being used in activism with young people.
2. Recognise some of the new approaches being used across Europe, their pros and cons.
3. Identify opportunities for digital innovation in your practice and that of colleagues/your organisation.
4. Think about the skills and resources that you might need for such approaches and be able to consider these within the contexts of the constraints of your organisation or setting
5. Be able to support young people to seek out examples of different types of digital engagement and make choices around what might work for them and their activism projects.

You can use this resource as an individual, with peers or colleagues, or you can use the materials with larger groups, those you work or train with, etc.

Section 1 – Where to Start? Let’s Start with You!

People who work in the broad European workforce are vital in supporting young people to be the very best they can be and to engage with and participate in an increasingly troubled and troubling world. Therefore, you, as one of those people, are important! So – let’s start with two questions for you.

Reflective Questions:

1. *What does innovation in creative digital youth work mean to you?*
2. *What experience do you have with innovative ways of working with young people?*



Comment: These are interesting questions, which can often be answered together, as you may have found that the responses overlap. We might start by asking, “what is meant by innovation or innovative?”

These are terms commonly used and applied to all manner of youth work activity, often for a purpose – to sell that activity as modern or contemporary, to emphasise how the youth work is focused on addressing concerns in a new or unique way. You may even be thinking that this term is often used to cover a multitude of issues, or even sometimes when the offer provided is not actually that new. These are pertinent and important points because the term innovative can be used in political or practical ways to do exactly the opposite to its meaning! Moreover, ‘creative’ can be used as a shorthand for anything different from normal. These don’t seem very exact ways of dealing with/describing these topics and activities.

The European Youth Information and Counselling Service (ERYICA) note, writing on their webpage in 2020, that in youth work at that time there were no publications or resources for youth workers that specifically focused upon creativity and innovation. In response they provided an e-resource, developed from a conference held in Finland on these topics. Given that ERYICA brought together diverse European experts to examine these issues, how did they define innovation and creativity? The approaches covered in the ERYICA download are: Art of Hosting, Design Thinking, Humour Techniques, Learning Experience Design, Digital Storytelling, Gamification and Photovoice. The ERYICA downloadable resource is inspiring and include non-digital and digital techniques and approaches – recommended reading. These are fantastic techniques and inspiration for youth worker development, some of which we also include here but more detail to focus specifically on the digital, introducing new areas, such as emancipatory poetry, graphic design/art and data verbalisation.

Colleagues from ERYICA comment that, innovation is not about ideas created just in the mind, unless this becomes action and real. It is, “*the external outputs of creative skills: a new service, an enhanced product, a thought-provoking piece of art or a more efficient method of learning a foreign language*”. In essence, they are arguing that innovation is about application, implementation and, through this, change.



<https://digismarts.eu/>

Innovation is only useful if it enables a departure in practice and/or the addressing of an issue in a new way that drives practice forward. In the next few sections, the DigiSMARTs team present some innovations from their own countries and others from across Europe, opening the opportunity to you to try these yourself.



Co-Funded by
the Erasmus+ Programme of
the European Union

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein. Project Number: 2020-1-UK-01-KA227-YOU-094609



Section 2: Innovation through Digital Poetry Projects

Poetry and Youth - an Introduction

The youth movements of poetry in Europe in the first two decades of the 2000s saw a resurgence of interest in the power of poetry as a means of self-expression and social critique. The movement was marked by a growing desire among young people to challenge traditional forms of poetry and to create a more inclusive and accessible form of poetry that reflected the experiences and perspectives of their generation.

One of the defining characteristics of this youth movement was its focus on the themes of identity, belonging, and the struggles of growing up. Young poets wrote about personal experiences, such as relationships, family, and mental health, as well as broader social and political issues, such as immigration, race, and gender. The themes of love, heartbreak, and self-discovery were also common in youth poetry of this era (Smith & Johnson, 2018).

Performing strategies were a key aspect of the youth movements of poetry in Europe in the early 2000s. Young poets often utilized performance techniques such as slam poetry, spoken word, and hip-hop to bring their work to life and connect with audiences. These performances were characterized by a dynamic and emotional energy that resonated with young audiences and provided a powerful platform for young people to express themselves and engage with issues that mattered to them (Park & Lee, 2019).

The use of social media also played an important role in the youth movements of poetry in Europe in the early 2000s. Platforms such as MySpace, Facebook, and YouTube provided young poets with a new way to reach audiences and build their brands. Through these platforms, young poets were able to connect with each other and share their work with a wider audience, contributing to a growing sense of community and connection among young poets across Europe (Khan & Ali, 2020).

Main Trends within Contemporary Youth Poetry

Contemporary youth poetry movements in Europe have been characterized by a number of distinct trends in recent years. These trends reflect the changing attitudes and perspectives of young poets, as well as the evolution of the literary landscape in Europe.

One of the main trends within contemporary youth poetry movements in Europe is the focus on social and political issues. Young poets are using their art to address issues such as gender equality, climate change, and race relations. They are using poetry to express their perspectives on these issues and to advocate for change.

Another trend is the use of innovative forms of poetry. Young poets are experimenting with new styles and techniques, breaking away from traditional forms of poetry. This experimentation has led to the creation of new and dynamic forms of poetry that engage audiences in new and innovative ways.



Performance is also a key trend within contemporary youth poetry movements in Europe. Young poets are using performance to present their poems to audiences, creating immersive experiences that allow audiences to engage with the poems on a deeper level. This trend has also led to a rise in collaborative poetry projects, where poets work together to create and promote their work.

The use of social media is another trend within contemporary youth poetry movements in Europe. Young poets are using platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter to promote their work and engage with audiences. Social media provides a way for young poets to reach a wider audience and to participate in conversations about the role of poetry in society.

Liberation from the Academic Poetry: the emancipation of the poetry movement

The Emancipation of Poetry movement is a contemporary European poetry movement that seeks to challenge traditional notions of poetry and liberate it from the constraints of academic and literary establishments. This movement emerged in the early 2000s and has been characterized by a focus on social and political issues, innovative forms of poetry, and the use of performance and multimedia in the presentation of poems.

The Emancipation of Poetry movement in Europe is a contemporary movement that aims to liberate poetry from the constraints of traditional literary and academic establishments. This movement emerged in the early 2000s and has been characterized by a focus on social and political issues, innovative forms of poetry, and the use of performance and multimedia in the presentation of poems.

Young poets drive this movement, and they seek to create a more inclusive and dynamic form of poetry. They draw inspiration from contemporary social and political issues and use poetry to express their perspectives and advocate for change. In doing so, they break away from traditional forms of poetry and challenge the conventional notions of what poetry can be.

The Emancipation of Poetry movement is also known for its use of performance and multimedia in presenting poems. This approach creates immersive experiences for audiences, allowing them to engage with the poems in new and dynamic ways. Poets also collaborate with one another, working together to create and promote their work and engaging in conversations about the role of poetry in society and its potential for activism.

In conclusion, the Emancipation of Poetry movement in Europe represents a significant shift in the landscape of contemporary poetry. Through its focus on social and political issues, innovative forms of poetry, and the use of performance and multimedia, this movement empowers young poets to use their art as a tool for advocating change.





Gender

Social media has provided a staging space for underrepresented voices to be heard. For example, many young LGBTQI+ poets use social media to share their experiences and challenges, creating a sense of community and validation for those who may not have had a platform to express themselves before (Park & Lee, 2020).

Social media has also provided young poets with an outlet to engage in activism and raise awareness about gender-related issues. By using their poetry as a form of political expression, young poets can bring attention to topics like gender discrimination and sex choices and spark important conversations (Khan & Ali, 2019).

One example of a poetry movement or campaign that addresses gender issues on social media platforms is the #QueerPoetry campaign on Instagram. This campaign, which was launched in 2019, aims to promote and celebrate the voices of LGBTQI+ individuals through poetry. Young poets, both LGBTQI+ and allies, use the hashtag to share their poems and connect with others who are passionate about these issues.

The #QueerPoetry campaign provides a platform for young people to express their experiences and perspectives on gender and sexuality and serves as a powerful tool for advocacy and activism. Using social media, young poets are able to reach a wider audience and help raise awareness about the experiences and struggles of the LGBTQI+ community (Smith & Johnson, 2020).

The use of social media in the #QueerPoetry campaign also allows for increased collaboration and community building among young poets. By connecting with others who share similar experiences and interests, young poets can build relationships and support systems that can help to sustain their activism and artistic pursuits (Lee & Kim, 2020).

Another campaign is the #MeTooPoetry campaign on Instagram is a poetry movement that was created in response to the #MeToo movement, which aimed to raise awareness about sexual harassment and assault. This campaign encourages young poets to use poetry as a means of speaking out about their experiences with gender-based violence and discrimination.

Using social media, young poets can share their poems and connect with others who are passionate about these issues. The #MeTooPoetry campaign provides a platform for young people to express their experiences and perspectives on gender and sexuality and serves as a powerful tool for advocacy and activism.

The use of social media in the #MeTooPoetry campaign also allows for increased collaboration and community building among young poets. By connecting with others who share similar experiences and interests, young poets can build relationships and support systems that can help to sustain their activism and artistic pursuits (Brown & Jones, 2019).





Environment

One of the ways in which social media has impacted the development of poetry on environmental and climate change issues is by providing a space for young poets to share their messages and inspire action. For example, the #ClimateVerse hashtag on Twitter has become a platform for young poets to share their poetry and engage in discussions about environmental and climate change issues (Brown & Davis, 2021).

Social media has also provided young poets with the opportunity to engage in activism and raise awareness about environmental and climate change issues. A prime example of this is the "Poetry for the Planet" campaign, which was started by a group of young poets in Europe in 2019. Through this campaign, young poets used their poetry to call attention to the urgent need for action on environmental and climate change issues and to inspire people to take action (Khan & Ali, 2020).

Additionally, the use of social media has allowed young poets to experiment with new forms of poetry and creative expression through the mix of videos, words, standups (Smith & Johnson, 2019).

Ethnic Discrimination or Inclusion

Poetry movements in Europe are playing a vital role in promoting ethnic inclusion and fighting against discrimination. One such movement is the #PoetryForChange, which inspires young people to use poetry as a powerful tool for speaking out against discrimination and advocating for diversity, equality, and inclusion. Poets are encouraged to share their works on social media using the #PoetryForChange hashtag and attend poetry events and readings aimed at raising awareness of social justice issues.

The #WordsForMigrants campaign is another such movement that focuses on anti-discrimination and ethnic inclusion. Through poetry, this campaign sheds light on the experiences and struggles faced by migrants in Europe. Poets are invited to share their works on social media using the hashtag #WordsForMigrants and participate in poetry events and readings that bring attention to the challenges faced by migrants in the region.

Minority communities, from diverse African, Asian, and Middle Eastern countries and heritages, have their own poetry movements that use social media to reach a broader audience and share their experiences and perspectives. One of the most notable examples is the #BlackLivesMatter poetry movement. This movement was founded with the goal of shedding light on the experiences of the black community and promoting anti-racism and racial equality. Poets are encouraged to share their works on social media using the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter and to take part in poetry events and readings that focus on raising awareness about racial justice issues. These events often feature spoken word performances, poetry slams, and open mic nights, where poets can come together to share their experiences and perspectives. By participating in these events and using social media





as a platform, poets from minority communities can bring attention to issues that are often overlooked or marginalized by mainstream society.

Social Media and the Spreading of Poetry as Voice and Activism

In Europe, social media has played a significant role in the spreading of poetry among young generations. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube have made it easier for young poets to share their work with a wider audience, leading to an increased interest in poetry among young people. With social media, young poets are able to reach a large and diverse audience, breaking down barriers and making it possible for new voices to be heard (Khan & Ali, 2020).

One of the key benefits of social media for young poets in Europe is the ability to create and participate in a sense of community. Hashtags and online groups have allowed young poets to connect with one another, share their work, and engage in discussions about poetry. This has helped to foster a supportive environment for young poets and has encouraged them to continue exploring their craft and developing their voices (Park & Lee, 2019).

In addition to creating a sense of community, social media has also allowed young poets to experiment with new forms of poetry. The rise of short-form video, for example, has led to the development of "micro-poetry" and "video poetry," which have become popular on social media platforms such as TikTok (Smith & Johnson, 2018).

Furthermore, social media has made it possible for young poets in Europe to engage in activism and raise their voices on political and social issues. Using spoken word poetry, young poets can use their art as a form of political expression, making their voices heard and raising awareness on important issues (Park & Lee, 2019).

How to Engage in Youth Poetry Movements:

- **Familiarize yourself with different poetry movements:** Research different poetry movements, such as #PoetryForChange, #WordsForMigrants, and #BlackLivesMatter, that focus on issues important to you.
- **Read and write poetry:** Read poetry written by other young people and start writing your own. Share your poems on social media using hashtags relevant to the movement you want to support.
- **Attend poetry events:** Participate in poetry events and readings organized by youth poetry movements. This will give you the opportunity to meet other young poets, learn from their experiences, and get inspired.
- **Use social media effectively:** Use social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook to share your poems and participate in online poetry events. Make sure to use relevant hashtags to reach a wider audience and join online communities that share your interests.





- **Get involved in campaigns:** Take part in campaigns organized by youth poetry movements. You can participate by sharing your poetry, attending events, or spreading the word about the campaign on social media.
- **Collaborate with other young poets:** Collaborate with other young poets and organize your own poetry events or campaigns. This will give you the opportunity to make a bigger impact and reach a wider audience.

Resources to Follow up about Emancipatory Poetry:

#PoetryForChange. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.poetryforchange.org/>

#WordsForMigrants. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.wordsformigrants.org/>

#BlackLivesMatter. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://blacklivesmatter.com/>



Section 3: Digital Storytelling and Community Reporting

Introduction

Digital storytelling, in a broad sense, can be considered an umbrella term for different kinds of storytelling activities, which utilize digital devices (Chan & Sage 2019). Digital storytelling enables people to tell authentic stories about their lives and experiences and offers a unique insight into their worlds (Keller, Virág & Trowbridge 2019; Trowbridge & Willoughby 2020). Digital storytelling methods have gained popularity along with digital technologies, e.g., in healthcare (De Vecchi et al., 2016), and social work (Chan & Sage 2019). The use of storytelling is often tied to a *change-making orientation* (Chan & Sage 2019) and its versatile nature enables various applications, such as experience gathering from vulnerable groups (Johnson & Kendrick 2017), a means of civic engagement (Greene et al. 2018), and a health promotion tool (Briant et al. 2016).



Source: https://cdn.pixabay.com/photo/2013/07/12/15/51/interviewer-150450_340.png

The digital storytelling method we have utilized in Turku University of Applied Sciences is *Community Reporting*, which is a pan-European storytelling movement aiming to challenge the status quo and enable the public sector to engage with citizens in an actual way (Trowbridge & Willoughby 2021; Trowbridge & Willoughby 2020). The idea behind Community Reporting is that when people are supported to tell their stories, the method also allows them to find their voice, challenges existing assumptions, and acts as a catalyst of change (Keller et al. 2019). Community Reporting's methodology is grounded on the Cynefin decision-making model (Snowden 1999), developed to assist decision-making. This model is especially suitable for complex environments and for addressing so-called 'wicked'

problems, as it brings forward different perspectives on the same issue (Trowbridge & Willoughby 2020).

An Example of Community Reporting Youth Work Practice from Finland

At Turku University of Applied Sciences we utilized Community Reporting as a part of a project called *Co-Creation of Service Innovation in Europe*, funded by CoSIE (Horizon 2020, www.cosie.turkuamk.fi). As a part of the project, undergraduates from the University were trained as Community Reporters, and gathered stories of other young people who were encountering different kinds of challenges in their lives, e.g. mental health problems, joblessness, friendlessness, and drug abuse. To access these young people and to hear about their lives, the student Community Reporters used their personal contacts and social media and even went out onto the streets of Turku to find these hard-to-reach youths. The students gathered altogether 22 stories from youths in vulnerable positions. The Community Reporting method enabled them to reach young people who were less likely to be engaged with formal services, and through this, we as a project team began to uncover some of the challenges that these young people were facing.

After the story gathering part of the process, we analysed the stories together with the students and defined four distinct, yet overlapping, profiles of 'marginalized' young people and their needs. These were: 1) Young people who need a helping hand, 2) Young people who are stuck in a rut, 3) Young people with a single issue to tackle and 4) young people with multiple, complex issues to tackle. Viewing the marginalisation of young people in this way enabled us to see a correlation between a young person's level of support needs and their sense of purpose.



Source: https://media.istockphoto.com/id/610242818/photo/lonely-man-leaning-against-an-urban-wall.jpg?b=1&s=170667a&w=0&k=20&c=gml3cSAHdQrBHa6ht5Hzqk_CJQHrpUWK6hV2ZpvnSoQ=

The results were discussed with the city of Turku officials, and the analysis and profiles were utilized at later points in their service development. The analysis and the videos served also as a starting point for a public service co-creation process implemented later on with young people, service professionals, city officials and the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities. The videos themselves gathered plenty of attention and some of them were shown on different occasions, e.g. in a national ecumenical event and at a local council meeting.

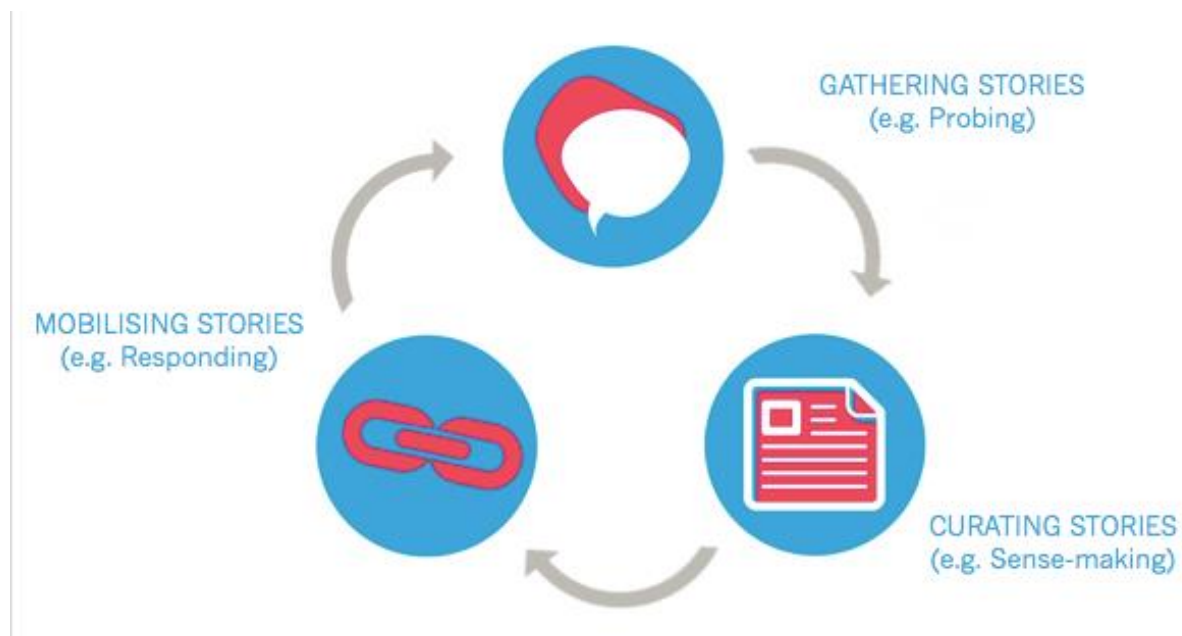
How Can you Replicate this Work in your Own Youth Work Practice?

The Community Reporting method has three components: 1) the actual story gathering; 2) story curation, during which the stories are analysed to extrapolate the most important findings and to understand them in the wider context; and finally, 3) the story mobilisation, as the learnings are connected from stories to people and organisations in positions to change things (Keller et al. 2019).

In the story gathering part, it might be sensible to train other youths to act as reporters and to reach youths, as it is probably easier to talk with a peer. The youths were asked an opening question related to their experiences with youth services in the city. After this, the discussion should have run freely as a normal conversation would. However, the reporter should always have some extra questions or topics with them, if the youth telling their story is not very talkative and the conversation dries out.

It is important to give the reporters proper training, in which special emphasis should be given to ethical and safety issues. It is also a good idea to involve the trainers in the analysing and curating part. Curation can be done e.g., through videos, soundscapes, blog posts, geo-maps, different kinds of presentations, and reports (People's Voice Media 2023a). Depending on your target, you can think about different ways to mobilise your stories as well. These include social media, websites, blogs and features, emails, presentations, events, and grassroots techniques (People's Voice Media 2023b).

The storytelling process can be represented like this:



Source: <https://communityreporter.net/about-us>

What are the benefits and drawbacks of this approach?

Digital storytelling is a very effective and thought-provoking tool and enables the voice of the seldom heard to be audible. With visualization and with the help of digital tools it is easy to create a message, which raises interest. It can also be empowering to the storyteller to get their voice heard and appreciated, especially if they feel that nobody has been interested about their point of view before. Digital storytelling is also very easy to use, as almost everyone has a mobile phone, with which to record videos or audio files. However, the storytelling technique might not be easy for the reporter, so it is good to practice beforehand with other reporters and watch example videos from the Community Reporter website.

The drawbacks are that it might not be so easy to approach people and get their acceptance for a video story, even if they deem the topic important. This might also be partially a culture-related factor. Ethical issues are very important to consider beforehand, especially when acting with vulnerable groups, such as young people. Written consent is needed from the participants and the whole process thoroughly explained beforehand.



Source: https://www.istockphoto.com/photo/news-reporter-making-media-or-vox-pop-interview-with-unrecognizable-person-gm1390329081-447334321?utm_source=unsplash&utm_medium=affiliate&utm_campaign=srp_photos_bot&utm_content=https%3A%2F%2Funsplash.com%2Fs%2Fphotos%2Finterview-in-a-street&utm_term=interview%20in%20a%20street%3A%3A%3A

Section 4: Using Animation as a Creative Youth Work

Method

Introduction to Animation

If one is trying to define the concept of animation, one would have to begin with the traditional definition stating that animation is a method by which still figures are manipulated to appear as moving images. Whether one uses hands to draw or paint the afore-mentioned still figures, or perhaps resort to computer-generated imagery, the possibilities offered by animation appear to be limitless. However, when one ventures to explore those possibilities offered by animation one encounters a rather genuine dilemma: is animation a genre or a medium? Resolving this dilemma at the beginning of our journey through animation is of utmost importance for the course of the entire journey, since one of these perspectives on animation is rather limiting, while the other pushes the boundaries and creates new potential landscapes in the field of activism.

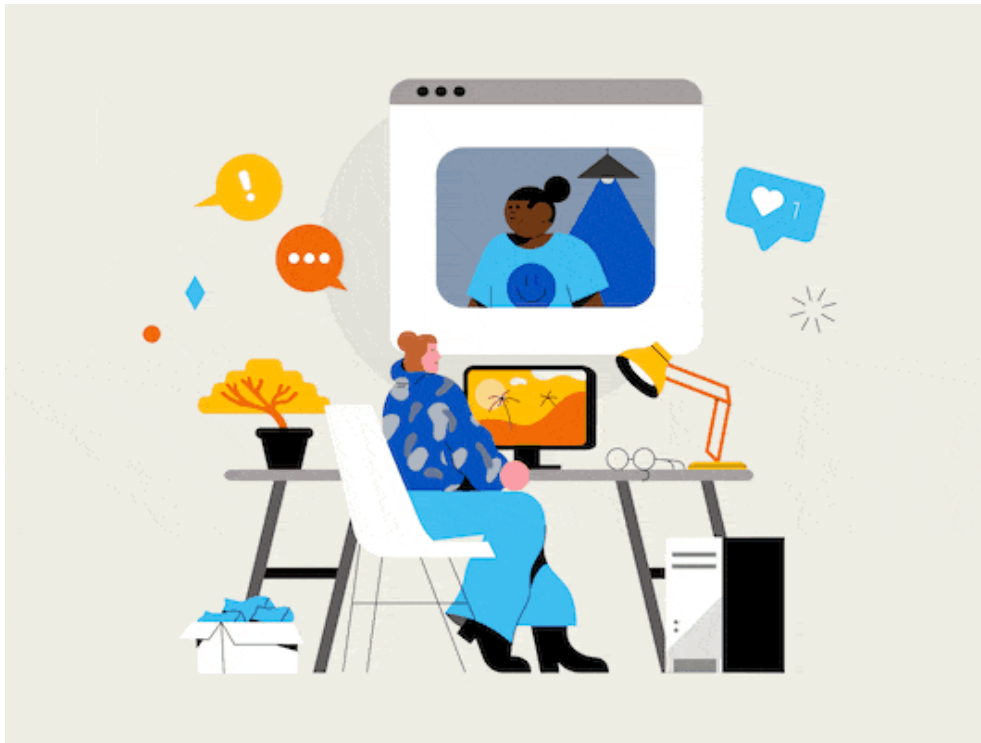
In examining animation as a genre, some might (and quite wrongfully so) reduce animation to animated movies mostly intended for children, i.e., kid's stuff, because as such they most often tend to be based on simple stories with the moral nicely wrapped into a colourful and humorous package.

Fortunately, the concept of animation has long gone beyond the notion of a genre, and its reach far surpasses the interests and capacities of the youngest population. Therefore, nowadays, it is much more often considered and utilised as a medium.

What is the big deal? Well, if we come to observe animation as a medium then the sky is the limit when it comes to possible uses of animation. It is fortunate that young people, mostly those belonging to Generation Z (1997-2012), understood that nothing is carved in stone and that every concept can and will be changed according to the times, potentials and those willing to reconsider the world around them. Thus, the chains of a genre have been removed from animation, and the concept began a whole new life in the form of a medium.

What is the main characteristic of animation as a medium? It is without a doubt the message it carries. Animation as a medium, a channel of storytelling, resorts to an imaginative and alluring vesture to attract different types of audiences with the aim of sending a message. Unlike conventional moving images, animation as an art form and its authors can play with visual images, abstract concepts, and powerful ideas to send a message in a much more vivid and understandable manner to a wider audience coming from different walks of life. It translates complex problems into visual images. On the other hand, animation is simply – friendly. Being for so long connected with contents intended exclusively for children, it has an aura of innocence which helps it cover some rather serious issues without being in danger of stigmatization by the public (at least not to the extent some other media are). This makes animation a perfect tool of social struggle. Some authors observe it as a shield: *the colour and flare provide enough escapism and distance to make*

the audience more accepting of controversy (Pulcini, 2020). Finally, animation offers a much wider plethora of possibilities than traditional live action. Namely, even complex philosophical and existential questions can be addressed through different animation settings which will not diminish the quest, but rather enhance the message.



Animation and Youth

In his writing on Disney, Soviet film theorist and filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein considers animation as *a subversive form of shapeshifting that resists Western rationalism and binary thinking in its appeal to ancient, evolutionary memories of being formless protoplasm; to the limitless imaginative freedom of childhood and to a joyous return to a state of animism in which all aspects of nature are interconnected* (Eisenstein, 2017). He points out that animated figures squash and stretch with plasmatic elasticity; these unstable forms can change shape, species, gender, or any other imposed boundary; can perform impossible tasks or survive death.

Despite all its potential, Eisenstein asserts that animated film ultimately lacks consequence and is an escapist, golden daydream: *Disney is a marvellous lullaby for the suffering and unfortunate, the oppressed and deprived. For those who are shackled by hours of work and regulated moments of rest, by a mathematical precision of time, whose lives are graphed by the cent and dollar* (Eisenstein, 1988:4).



Today, however, one can rightfully ask oneself: can animation surpass escapism to become a tool of real everyday social action, and consequently social change? This question brings us to the inevitable connection between animation as a medium of social action, and young activists as agents of social change. For there are different means and methods of sending a message, and animation is by far the most appealing. Long time ago Eisenstein was on the right track, feeling that animation hides the power of subversion, like any other form of art, and that its role in the society can be essential if used in a right way (in this instance as a medium of social change, rather than a beautiful content-shaping shell that genre is).

Just like with any other media of storytelling (social media, movies, books, theatre, puppets, poetry, games (both digital and traditional), animation is a method of telling a story in an interesting and engaging, and still serious and driving manner. When we know how to tell a story we are ready to use it to advocate a cause, raise an issue, and suggest a solution to a problem.

The young and the animation medium make a natural symbiosis. Animation is the birthplace of the youth, their natural habitat, and using animation to make a difference should be as natural as picking up a hot cup of coffee from Starbucks in the morning on your way to work.

The youth can use animation to express emotions, dream up inspirational ideas, have a dazzling display of creativity, persuade people of good causes through play and humour, raise awareness of virtually any alarming issue, and call to action in such a way to inspire and move the masses.

Even though animation in its various forms is becoming increasingly interesting to the young for various reasons, young people have only scratched the surface when it comes to the concept of animation and its usability for different purposes, activism certainly being one of them. The young, just like animation in Eisenstein's view, are inquisitive by nature and prone to challenging and questioning the established forms of thinking and acting. Therefore, it is possible for the youth to resort to animation and claim this medium for themselves, harness its potentials and put it in the service of their causes.

Every topic that can take a shape of a story can be perceived through the medium of animation, even more successfully so. Every potential social issue, every problem that bothers the young and inspires them to take action can be raised through the medium of animation: underprivileged position in the society, identity issues (sex, gender, race, ethnicity, religion), political struggles, social relationships (family, friendship, marriage, etc.), wellbeing, physical and/or mental disability, climate change, migration, etc. Animation can be the language of action, the voice of the vulnerable, the cry of those who otherwise cannot be heard. The content which the young can depict through visual images can become their canvas of social action.

And what is the stage where such a visual message can be displayed? All the world is a stage, says the Bard. Even more so with the digital meadows offered by the era of social media, virtual spaces, platforms, sites, and clouds. A whole world of parallel digital latitudes



has been created, and all one needs to do is venture into those digital fields. There the youth can share their ideas, concerns, suggestions, protest, and outcries with peers and the like-minded, or with those of opposite and conflicting standpoints with the purpose of tackling important topics including a wider community and using an appealing medium which would provoke candid discussion and help visualise the potential solutions.

Animation and Activism

Can animation be a tool for activism? The answer is – yes, it can. There are ample examples of animation being put into service of social activism. It can be used to investigate social problems, raise awareness, to educate and/or to provoke change.

With the digital turn in media production and especially with the advent of the so-called 'Web 2.0', animation became a powerful tool in political, educational and/or activist campaigns on the Internet. In the virtual environment, animation finds large and diverse audiences who, owing to the growing availability of software, may even become engaged to produce animations themselves – from automatically generated GIFs that comment on various social and/or political events to complex and intricate animated videos. Animation possesses various features that make it compelling and potentially highly influential. Namely, by resorting to animation one can either exaggerate or simplify a message, make it appear less complicated, resort to universal symbols, innovative and ingenious metaphors, to provide images for the invisible and the covert, etc. By rearranging the relation between *reality* and *imagination*, animation can become a medium of transformation, and a driver of change.

Animation proved to be pivotal in drawing attention of a wider audience to some of the most appalling social events such as racially-motivated murders, depriving women of the right to decide about their bodies, the destruction of life on Earth due to the short-sightedness of corporations and petty profiteers, etc.

The ***Black Lives Matter*** protests raised global awareness of structural racism and racially motivated crimes. Even though the movement mainly involved direct action in the streets, different online videos (including the animated ones) played an important role in documenting police brutality, expressing solidarity with the demonstrators, inform the public, and pay tribute to the victims.

In Poland, protesters have taken to the streets raising their voices against a new law which makes nearly all forms of abortion illegal in the country. Students from ***the Łódź Film School*** decided to create a piece of protest animation against this shameful decision.

Finally, ***Greta Thunberg's*** powerful ***TED speech*** was turned into an animation video with the idea of keeping the message lasting and strong, and reaching a wider audience through a simplified version of the speech accompanied by a minimalist animation that provides the message with a different, yet equally powerful cloak.





Animation 1. Greta Thunberg's TED speech turned into an animated video

The Main Trends in Animation as a Tool of Social Action

In the past decades, digitization and increasing use of tablets, smartphones, internet, mobile and web applications have introduced considerable changes to the market and the way audiences (especially youth) consume content.

The main idea of resorting to animation among youth is based on utilizing non-formal education and art as effective tools for children, teachers, youth, and lifelong learning programmes. As a result, one can encounter international training courses for youth, teachers, workshops, exhibitions, shows and local festivals. Non-formal education and lifelong learning focus on the following topics: human rights, social exclusion, poverty, environmental problems, cultural degeneration, democracy, children rights, children violence, children labour, children in prisons and local social problems. The youth tend to resort to animation with the idea of considering the matters such as hate speech, climate change, gender equality, discrimination, and racism, etc. With the help of animated content, the youth express their standpoints and advocate and uphold potential changes.

In return, animation provides youth with an innovative tool for expressing the aforementioned standpoints and beliefs, as well as a means of acting upon them. Resorting to animation is an act of departure from the usual forms of expression, whereby animation is no longer considered a niche for simple morals intended for the youngest but a powerful, subversive instrument to engage the crowds and include them into the process of problem-solving. Hence, animation provides an opportunity for young people to share their stories, convey emotions and promote ideas in a way which is equally understandable and comprehensible to both children and adults. Due to its friendly form and universal language, animation can connect people regardless of their origin, home language, or geographical location. Thus, animation can inspire people with different interests from different parts of the world to become united around a common goal. When gathered around a common cause people get the chance to share ideas, change perspectives and engage in a creative and critical thinking inspired by the variety and diversity of viewpoints. Under such

circumstances, the youth gathered around a common cause can generate powerful animated messages combining striking visuals, sound effects, music and the general tone of the video (emotional, satirical, poetic, ironic, etc.), or even engage in a joint animation endeavour by creating **an anijam**, which is *a collaborative animation devoted to a single, agreed upon issue where the last frame of an artist's animation is the first frame of the next artist's animation*. Animation campaigns can be shared on a wide variety of media such as social networks, web pages, activist platforms, etc.

Possible Niches of using Animation in Youth Activism

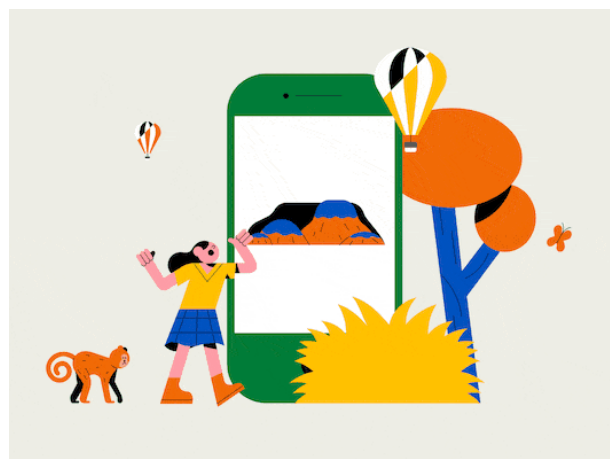
“Down with art that aspires to be nothing more than a spot of beauty on the ugly lives of the rich. Down with art that tries to be a glittering stone in the merciless and dirty lives of the poor. Down with art whose sole purpose is to escape a life not worth living. Work for life and not for palaces, cathedrals, cemeteries and museums. Work in the midst of all and with everyone.” (Alexander Rodtschenko, *Slogans*, 1920/21).

From the threat of global warming, growing famine around the world, trampled human rights, mental health concerns (and the list goes on), in recent years society has become much more aware of different issues affecting our planet and the people on it. With conversations about these topics taking place all around the world, animators have captured the spirit of the times.

Animations have begun using agreeable, charming and captivating characters to address forthright, authentic issues such as hate speech, climate change, disabilities, wellbeing and mental health, human rights, etc. Introducing the audiences to these characters and narratives has created a generation of young people who feel compelled and comfortable discussing these previously taboo topics and be more aware of the world around them.

One of the key benefits of social media for young animators in Europe is the ability to create and participate in a sense of community. In addition to creating a sense of community, social media has also allowed young animators to experiment with new forms of expression.

How to Engage in Animation for a Better Society



- **Become acquainted and familiar with different social issues and try to give it a face of animation.**
- **Learn about and use animation, from traditional forms to new digital possibilities:** Don't be afraid to venture into the world of animation by starting with simple ideas and forms which send a powerful message. Share ideas with people and discuss the initial results. Do not be afraid to make the first step.
- **Attend animation classes and/or tutorials.**
- **Use social media effectively.**
- **Use animation to become involved in campaigns.**
- **Collaborate with the community of animators**



Animation 2. Hunger – the world's greatest solvable problem



Animation 3. MAN



Animation 4. The Man who Planted Trees



Section 4: Graphic Design and Youth Work

Understanding Graphic Design and Youth Work: it's not just for young people that can draw

Graphic art can be a powerful tool in youth work, offering numerous benefits and opportunities for engagement. It allows for creative expression, promotes visual communication, and fosters critical thinking skills. Graphic art can be used to facilitate discussions on important topics, such as mental health, social justice, or personal identity. It can also be utilized to develop digital literacy, as young people learn to navigate design software and explore multimedia platforms. Furthermore, graphic art can enhance teamwork and collaboration, as youth work together on projects, exchanging ideas and perspectives. Overall, graphic art offers an inclusive and engaging medium for self-expression and youth empowerment within the realm of youth work.

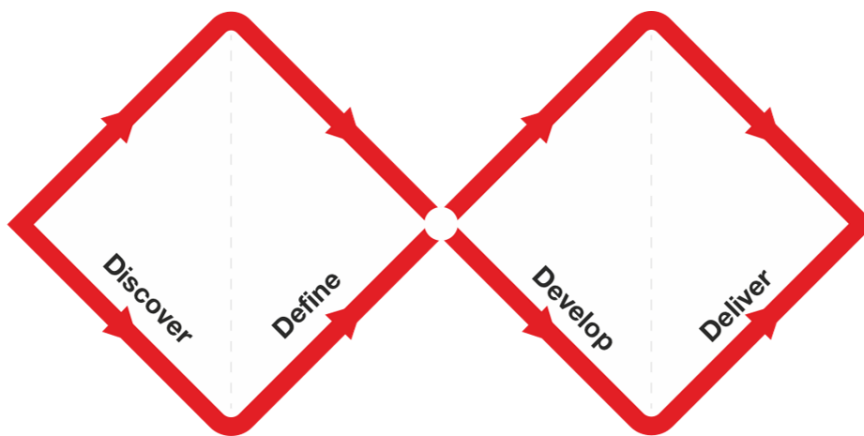
Considered a modern construct, design is both a study and a practice that can lead into opportunities that create impact, have functionality, and encourage aesthetic development. Design is continuously evolving to reflect cultural and societal changes and many of our lives are affected by design daily (International Council of Design, 2023). Graphic design, not to be mixed up with marketing, can be defined as the process of putting together visual and typographic elements to form part of a message and convey values to the outside audience. (Mulyansalu, 2023). There are recent arguments which suggest distinct design disciplines i.e., graphic design, continues to dissolve due to accelerated design activity 'being smeared over problems of the world' (Rogers and Bremner, 2017). Despite this thinking, there is growing evidence to suggest that design, including the discipline of graphic design, works holistically and methodologically to demystify and empower the solutions for the end user. The book '*Design for Social Change*' by Andrew Shea and Ellen Lupton (2012) illustrates several examples of where graphic design has been used with communities to achieve a positive social purpose.

Youth Work, similarly, can be defined as a distinct educational process, guided by a set of clear values and practice principles (National Youth Agency, 2021). Depending on where you deliver youth work in the world, will frame the age range you work with, but typically Youth Work lends itself to working with those in the adolescent category, ages between 10 – 25. A sector which is often misunderstood, has over the years, clarified distinctive principles that make it 'Youth Work'. These include young people choosing to take part, utilizing young people's view of the world, promoting equality of opportunity and to develop young people's skills (Batsleer, 2012; Davies, 2010; National Youth Agency, 2021).

It could be argued that graphic design and youth work fields have the energy and force to create high impact for real young people. Imagine for a moment we put youth work and graphic design together under the spotlight. Both share the idea of following a process to support and inform value to others and working holistically could produce a host of ideas, possibility, messages, and audiences to be reached.

Considering the Design Process and Design Principles

‘Design for social change’ or ‘design for social impact’ are terms that are increasingly attractive to graphic designers as an alternative to the more traditional corporate routes (Shea, 2012: 08). They are terms used globally in the use of graphic design for supporting communities and individuals to envision social change and understand the process of working towards that. During the early 2000’s, individuals inside The Design Council (UK), were set the challenge of defining the design process, with the ambition that it could be applied to any field (The Design Council, 2023). After many conversations and iterations, the concept of the ‘Double Diamond Framework’ was born – the Framework is depicted below.



The framework seeks to use a four-stage process to support individuals in using design to help innovate, as a way of checking in, and also as a method to help shape the strategy of any project. Today the Double Diamond Framework is still commonly used, especially when working within innovation. A blank template to be worked on can be found at: <https://www.mural.co/templates/double-diamond>

DISCOVER

The first diamond helps people understand, rather than simply assume, what the problem is. It involves speaking to and spending time with people who are affected by the issues.

DEFINE

The insight gathered from the discovery phase can help you to define the challenge in a different way.

DEVELOP

The second diamond encourages people to give different answers to the clearly defined problem, seeking inspiration from elsewhere and co-designing with a range of different people.

DELIVER

Delivery involves testing out different solutions at small-scale, rejecting those that will not work and improving the ones that will.

Traditionally, graphic design follows clear principles to help designers understand how to piece different solutions together, in order to create the most impact and achieve the right balance. According to Reid (2022), seven principles that must be considered for graphic design are:

Emphasis – *the focal point of the design (typically a heading or an image),*



Balance and alignment – *avoiding crowding all parts in one space, spacing it out,*

Contrast - *the difference between elements in your design. For examples making your background significantly different from the colour of other elements (i.e., text),*

Repetition – *2 – 3 colours, 2 – 3 fonts – this means this will repeat somewhere in your design therefore creating unification,*

Proportion – *suggested as important if some elements are to be bigger or smaller,*

Movement – *layout which helps the eye to move from one thing to the next, to ensure the information is properly communicated to your audience,*

White space – *for designs that deal with more of an ‘empty page’.*

Following these principles supports a more ‘successful’ design and ensuring the work has some purpose. Of course, experimenting with the ideas comes before this, these principles will help when it comes to the final composition.

How Can this be Used in Youth Work?

Often in youth work, young people are asked to gather their ideas on what they want to use towards the next strategy. When young people are asked this, if trust and a safe space have been established, they are often inventive, innovative, and creative with their ideas. However, it is often the word ‘creative’ that can put many doubts in both the youth worker and the young person's mind. As the above design process shows, there is no need to be able to ‘draw’ or ‘create’ to be able to participate in design. Instead, it involves reframing the word ‘design’ and considering the following in our process:

- Young people/youth workers start as a team, everyone's ideas count,
- Utilise what individuals *ARE* good at – for example young people are great at researching with their phones, this can be used as part of the discovery phase,
- Consider the tools used. If everything starts on paper, we can move to digital later,
- Consider collaboration with other groups – promote ‘testing’ ideas out with each other and capture the inspiration that arises,
- Celebrate the outcome – it might not be what you thought you would end up with but put in time to celebrate the achievements and share the outcome.

It is also worth considering additional benefits of having a go at a design project with young people could have; increased confidence, better mental health, sense of achievement and being heard. Throughout current psychological literature, creativity and identity development are shown to have a symbiotic relationship for young people (Ragozini, 2023). As we move through the 21st century, young people's engagement in creativity is being promoted through youth work activities, design of new services and as a response to rapid societal changes.

Getting the Right Skills, Knowledge, and Expertise

As an individual youth worker, you will have your own level of skill and knowledge around using graphic art, which might vary from very low skills to high levels and competencies. To utilise graphic art techniques, it is necessary to have those skills and the physical resources to be able to undertake development. Much early development can, as noted above, be done on paper with pens but the fact remains that for graphic artwork you will need to move onto laptops and so forth. The main ways of tackling the need for skills in the field include:

- Working with other youth workers who already have these skills, learning from them and then applying those skills in your project,
- Working in collaboration with professional graphic artists who have the skills and learn from them,
- Connecting with young people who you work with who might already have these skills, i.e., may be studying graphic art at school or college. Alternatively, setting up a connection with a local college or higher educational institution (HEI) graphic arts course and engaging lecturers and young people from there in your project. This will enable you to work together to create materials. This can often be a mutually useful arrangement as colleges often wish to develop community engagement activities and be seen to be supporting local projects for good,
- Many skills can be learned from the internet and web resources too and there are some courses run from youth work organisations too.

If you are going to undertake graphic artwork with young people, it is imperative to garner expertise through one of these routes. In addition, funding will typically be needed to support running a graphic arts intervention. The next learning resource of the DigiSMARTS project examines securing funding for youth digital activism projects, which may be of use, and we would advise you to use that resource.

A Graphic Design Example: Mental Health Booklet

This case study is developed from Chloe Dennis-Green's work as an experienced youth worker and youth work educator at Birmingham City University, UK. She has often used graphic design in a UK youth work context and provides an exemplar of such activity here. She writes:

On my journey to discovering and developing my understanding of how graphic design and youth work can become better integrated, I have had the privilege of testing out graphic design ideas and principles with multiple groups of young people. One example I can share is that of a mental health booklet designed by a group of young carers. In the UK, young carers are defined as people under the age of 18 who looks after a family member or friend who has a physical or mental health condition, or misuses drugs or alcohol. They may also look after brothers, sisters, parents/guardians or elderly relatives too. To help understand what was implemented I will take you through the process we used:



Discover: A group of young carers who were meeting as a youth group, were asked what they would like to work on as their 'final' project before the groups' final session. Young people suggested a mental health booklet.

Define: Mental health, being a huge topic, was broken down by the young people to focus on three elements 'Talk, Action and Distraction'. They felt these three elements were the basis of helping all of them and would appeal to other young carers. Ask 'normen' was a feature of the booklet where advice was provided to youth concerns.



A logo created as part of the 'Define' Stage.

Develop: Over the course of two weeks, young people met to discuss what information they would like to see in the booklet and spoke with peers and service workers for feedback on this. They then divided their efforts into the creation of the content and completed drawings, collages, photography, poems, and quotes. For those young people who did not feel they wanted to contribute to this part, they participated in the layout of the creation/information.



Some of the examples of how young people contributed

Deliver: An initial version was created, with changes that followed to the layout and colours – fed back by young people. The delivery plan then included printing several copies and planning on including them in a ‘mental health support’ bag for young carers. The move to a digital booklet was also discussed. However, for the young people it was very much a goal to work towards, they were happy for the booklet to be sent around as a digital version in the meantime.

*A Young Persons Guide to Looking After
Your Wellbeing and*

**Mental
Health**

TALK
C
T
O
N
(DISTRACTION) AND asknorman

A Young Persons Guide to Looking After Your

**WELLBEING AND
MENTAL HEALTH**

TALK
C
T
O
N
(DISTRACTION) AND asknorman

Examples of implementation of changes in the layout of the front cover in the 'Deliver' Stage.

Although following the design process here, design principles were something that was considered at a later stage, which worked better for this group of young people. The outcome was a 'wellbeing pack' which was handed out to young people, with the booklet eventually available digitally.

Applications with Digital Activism

A rise in digital use from young people is significant in the UK, with 83% of 12–15-year-olds reporting ownership of a smartphone (The Children's Society, 2022). If more young people could use their digital connection in line with graphic design to produce digital activist campaigns, it could inspire a whole generation to rethink 'design'. Their exciting ideas could be channelled through a method which gains traction and supports young people's voices to being heard.

Design for activism is a term sometimes used alongside 'Design for social' good and this is where design elements (colours, fonts, images) and design principles (as listed above) are used to convey meaning through visuals to support a cause or crisis (Levanier, 2022).

Here are some examples of how graphic art can be integrated into youth projects:

Creating awareness campaigns: *Youth organizations have used graphic art to design visually appealing posters, banners, and infographics to raise awareness about social issues like climate change, bullying, or drug abuse.*

Designing community murals using digital techniques: *Youth groups collaborate with professional artists or within their own community to create large-scale murals that reflect their shared values, aspirations, or cultural identity, beautifying public spaces and fostering a sense of belonging.*

Digital storytelling: *Through graphic novels, comics, or animations, young people can express their personal narratives, explore their heritage, or share experiences and*



perspectives on topics like mental health, immigration, or discrimination. This is also discussed in the section above within this toolkit and shows how creative forms of youth work overlap. Using graphic art helps to support other youth activism activities.

Designing promotional materials: Youth-led initiatives, such as events, workshops, or fundraisers, benefit from graphic art in the creation of eye-catching logos, flyers, brochures, and social media graphics to attract and engage participants.

Interactive workshops: Graphic art is used to facilitate workshops where young people can learn graphic design skills, including illustration, typography, and photo editing, empowering them to express themselves creatively and develop marketable abilities.

Game design: Youth organizations and/or public authorities utilize graphic art to develop educational or entertaining games that address important issues, allowing young people to participate actively in the learning process while promoting critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Zines and publications: production of zines and publications featuring artwork, photography, and graphic design to showcase youth talents, share stories, and amplify youth voices within their communities.

These examples highlight the versatility of graphic art in youth projects, emphasizing its capacity to inspire, educate, and empower young people while fostering creativity and self-expression.

A powerful example of how this has been executed successfully can be seen in the 2020 'Resourcing Youth Led, Groups and Movements Playbook' by CIVICUS & RECREAR International. The resource was researched, designed and created by 8 young leaders and focuses on resourcing youth-led groups and movement. It uses images, stories and reflective pieces/exercises to communicate and build awareness of better participation for young people in funding and recognising how donors and others can collaborate with youth. In doing this graphic art, designed by the youth leaders is used to powerfully convey the nature of the project and deliver – what is usually very dry, and some might think dull – information about funding. In this resource using colour, diverse image, and good design, it achieves the effect of inviting the reader in and encouraging engagement.

The resource captures each story using powerful illustrations, co-created with young people, alongside an explanation of use in practice. The stories also feature a hashtag to digitally capture examples of where individuals have used this playbook.



Images: César Duarte Higuera (2021)

<https://www.behance.net/gallery/130061115/Resourcing-Youth-Led-Groups-and-Movements>

A full version of the playbook can be found at: <https://www.civicus.org/documents/en-Playbook-2020-march.pdf> and information about how the youth action lab members work together and create materials – which have an impact of social change and activism, please see information available at: <https://civicus.org/documents/youth-action-lab/civicus-yal-toolbox-introduction.pdf>

Another good resource for inspiration can be found at Estyn’s website. They are an organisation that inspect training and education in Wales, a country that is part of the United Kingdom. They have a resource about young person-led digital innovation available at: www.estyn.gov.wales/effective-practice/transforming-youth-work-provision-young-person-led-digital-innovation

In addition, you can also look for further design inspiration from companies that are not youth-led but that might inspire young people in how they design, imagery and examples of work that is possible. For instance: Snook – is a design agency, which states it has a fairness and ethical agenda. The design of images on the site is interesting - www.wearesnook.com

Tools to consider

This offering of tools to consider is by no means a replacement of the skills offered by a qualified graphic designer and what that can bring to the project. If budget allows, consider bringing a designer along with you on the journey, their expert knowledge and practical experience may support with setting up a project or finishing off your final product. However, if this is not the case, there are currently some free to use software packages which have been developed over the last few years to help beginners with graphic design. These are as follows:



- **Canva** – an online design and publishing tool designed to empower everyone to use design.

Available at: www.canva.com

- **Adobe Express** – Adobes free software which includes unique templates and design assets. Can be used both on the web and on mobile.

Available at: www.adobe.com/express

- **Design Wizard** – free design software to support with the creation of video and image designs quickly and easily.

Available at: www.designwizard.com

Final Comments

Following a process of applying design thinking with youth work principles supports young people in creating and executing their own digital activism campaigns. Using graphic design in some of the ways suggested in this section not only opens working with young people in a creative and innovative dynamic, and, in addition, it also often leaves tangible evidence to support the evaluation of the wonderful work being done. Youth digital activism is the perfect place to test these ideas, collaborate on unique and exciting ‘briefs’ with young people and celebrate the outcomes and impact that can be achieved.

Additional Links and Resources around Graphic Arts Use:

Double Diamond Template <https://www.mural.co/templates/double-diamond>

Canva Design resource address www.canva.com

Adobe Design resource address www.adobe.com/express

Design Wizard resource address www.designwizard.com

Section 4: Using Voice, Sound, Music and Self as Data

Verbalisation in Digital Youth Work Activism

Introduction

This section builds on those above to reflect on and address the question:

- *How can we deliver digital activism in such a way that people from different backgrounds can engage, respond, and hopefully act?*

Digital activism, like all forms of communication, participation, and political involvement (with a small or capital p, depending on the matter at hand), exist in a societal and digital marketplace of overload and noise. To get your point across in this arena, it is necessary to think about how to gain exposure and interest in an information-cluttered world. This section of the output focuses upon new and emerging ways of getting messages across, to other youth and members of the public, to industries, authorities, policy makers and places of power, in ways that will ensure they hear and engage with the message and that it will elicit response. Good activism is in great part about recognising and responding to diverse audiences and a successful reach-out process. To do this, the section uses the pioneering work of Dr Martin Glynn. You can find out more about Martin, his approach, work, and publications at the Blesst Centre website, <https://www.blesst.co.uk/> and his Birmingham City University page - <https://www.bcu.ac.uk/social-sciences/about-us/staff/criminology-and-sociology/martin-glynn>

Foregrounded in this section, is the reality that digital activism is only as good as its ability to convey things to others in a way that they can understand and are likely to listen to. For all the innovation there may be in gathering information to drive activism, to have **impact** this requires presentation of material that captures the audience – this is where data verbalisation can help us with many creative digital youth work activities around activism.

Question – What is data-verbalisation?

Data verbalisation is a method developed by Dr Martin Glynn (shown to the left) to address



the problem of getting information to have the impact and reach that it needs to have. The term refers to the process of expressing or articulating data in a verbal or spoken form. This could involve converting numerical or statistical information into descriptive narratives or explanations, using speech, voice technology, sound and other medium as performance, to interact with and communicate data insights. In activism this is essential because, quite often, using traditional methods to involve or petition authorities and other audiences for knowledge, is often lost in the range of information offered online today. There are many competing issues that can minimise your activism and campaign impact; finding the right medium can help you and your activism campaign to stand out. Speaking, writing,



being heard and seen in different ways provides opportunities and ways of working that can help to break through these barriers.

Dr Glynn is a criminologist, critical race theorist and interdisciplinary scholar, who works at Birmingham City University, UK, in diverse communities across the city of Birmingham and globally. He has spent the last twenty years trying to find the 'secret sauce' of delivering information around social justice and activism causes. Here we will discuss and consider the application of his ideas to your own work as a youth worker. Glynn's book, *Speaking Data and Telling Stories: Data Verbalization for Researchers*, examines the interdependent relationship between research methods, delivering data and 'practice' (performance), but it has broader application to speaking out to and connecting with, others more generally through knowledge and ideas we develop.

Question: What engages people in Contemporary Society – What Stands out Above the Information-Clutter for you and makes you stop, look, listen, and participate in issues online?

Comment: There are many things in life that might grab you, capture your attention and get you to engage. Advertisers and various forms of media use colour and music to draw your attention, for instance, but they also try to appeal to aspects of an audience – they use connection and empathy, often using ideas, objects and sounds that are aspirational or linked to aspects of life experience for particular groups or individuals. It is the delivery of the personal, of the experiential and feelings (emotions) that can really engage different groups and individuals. In addition, that delivery needs to be easily understandable and accessible to be truly successful.

The Approach

The data verbalisation approach developed by Dr Glynn was inspired by a variety of texts, key thinkers and emancipatory practices. However, one of the main drivers was a text that some of you might be familiar with from youth work practice - *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970). Freire argues that typical educational practices serve to support the dominance of the powerful within societies and thereby maintain the social, political, and economic status quo of power relations. To overcome the oppression that is endemic in exploitative societies, education must be remade to inspire and enable oppressed people in their struggle for liberation. This style of education focused on consciousness-raising, dialogue, and collaboration between teacher and student in the effort to achieve greater equality. Likewise, data verbalisation arises from a recognition of the need for action for liberation. In the case of data verbalisation, it is the need for data, knowledge, ideas, and experience to be delivered in a way that raises consciousness, challenges those receiving the knowledge to think critically, encourages dialogue and co-working and ensures that diverse voices are heard. Even today, with the internet and such diverse and competing sources of data and information all around us, delivery of information is often not appropriate to audiences and is certainly not empowering.





Innovative Communication of Ideas in Digital Arenas Using Data Verbalisation in Youth Digital Activism

Martin Glynn's work is wide-ranging in coverage and impact, with strong relevance to any area of youth work where communication and delivery of messages to diverse groups are vital, which effectively is crucial to all youth work! Dr Glynn's work is particularly used in thinking about working with young people, where there is already some data and developed ideas around activism that the group wish to spread further through effective use of the digital. These might be, for example:

- Sets of data or information that you have gathered from online investigation. For instance, from looking at the work of key digital youth activists, as outlined above, or digital information that pertains to a local/regional/national issue that is of importance to your activism aims.
- Data and information you have gathered non-digitally, perhaps locally, regionally, or nationally, but that you now want to transform and communicate to others through using the digital.

In both cases, you have information and data that you want to share with others in such a way that supports effective engagement. Data verbalisation offers the opportunity to perform that information or data. But why would you want to **perform** data? Performance is an innovative and broad set of techniques that can help you to reach out to wider audiences, groups and stakeholders so that they can understand your message better. In effect, you want to ensure they listen and engage with what you are doing and that it has impact upon them. Using data verbalisation and creative techniques online can facilitate and enable greater reach out, understanding, interaction with others and can inspire further action.

Thinking point – using the following groups can you think of any benefits to presenting the data and information you have through data verbalisation techniques: other young people; policy makers and strategic players; the general public?

Comment: *There are lots of reasons why using rhyme, music and diverse spoken techniques might engage these different groups. For young people, a creative approach might be more appealing, could be honed to use language and sound in ways that make sense to their age group and sub-cultures. For policy makers and strategic players, they are very used to being bombarded with information, often in very dull and boring formats. Much information is ignored, even by policy makers who should listen, because they have information overload – too much and too similar – coming at them at once. Data verbalisation can make vital issues and concerns stand out, especially when presented in young people's language and speech, along with creative music, sounds and rhyme.*

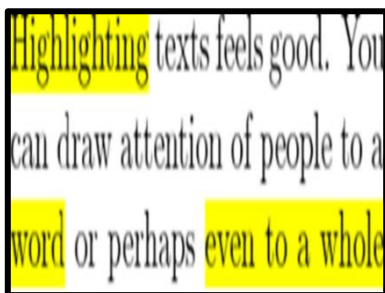
But what about the general public? The public, like other stakeholders, are presented constantly with information and often in very uninteresting, uninspiring formats. Again,

data verbalisation and performance might help them to grasp the issues and get more involved. With this in mind, let's examine next how to undertake data verbalisation.

A Step-by-step approach to how you can work with these techniques with young people:

What now follows is taken from material created by Dr Martin Glynn, which he uses to support learning around data verbalisation in various contexts. Much of below is taken verbatim from Glynn (2020)

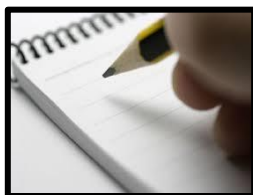
****** Highlighting ******



Read through your chosen *material* several times, to gain an insight into the story contained within the research or data. On becoming familiar with the overall narrative drive of it, **highlight** key phrases and important words. Next, transfer the highlighted information to index cards and group them into categories.

At the heart of desistance research is a very simple idea: people can change. Although crime has long been understood as a 'young man's game' (and here the gender choice is intentional), criminal justice policy and practice, especially in the US, has unfortunately been based on the notion that the 'offender' is somehow different than the ordinary person and 'once a criminal, always a criminal' (Maruna and King, 2009). Desistance research, in this context, was a recognition of the vast number of 'false positives' in this pessimistic assumption of risk. That is, most of the people we label as 'offenders' spend only a short time in their lives involved in criminality.

****** Phrases ******



Structure your phrases and words into categories. By making a detailed list, you will begin to see connections. In doing so, you will have laid the foundation for developing the phrases and words into a story.

- At the heart of desistance
- people can change.
- Although crime has long been understood as a ‘young man’s game’
- criminal justice policy and practice,
- has unfortunately been based on the notion that the ‘offender’
- somehow different than the ordinary person
- ‘Once a criminal, always a criminal’
- Desistance
- recognition of the vast number of ‘false positives’
- pessimistic assumption of risk.
- most of the people we label as ‘offenders’ spend only a short time in their lives involved in criminality.

**** Rhymes ****



Creating rhymes is the most rewarding part of writing any lyric, but the most frustrating if it doesn’t work. To write rhyme well takes practice. The careful use of the right word at the right time can make or break a piece of work. To avoid forced rhyming (rhyme made because you can’t find the right word to match another) use a dictionary, thesaurus, and rhyming dictionary to assist you.

- *Rhyme is a science all of its own. Study every form.*
- *Don’t be lazy. Use words/rhymes wisely.*
- *Learn how to edit rhymes.*
- *Break the rules once you know them.*
- *Don’t be too clever. Make the rhyme suit the form.*
- *Let it go if it’s not working.*
- *Be economical with your rhymes.*

**** Story Construction ****

The next stage focuses upon story construction and creating rhyme and verses, drawing from the identified words and selected words and phrases.

At the heart of desistance, we know that many offenders shift 'N' change
'N' the perception that crime is a 'young man's game' clearly remains
Whilst criminal justice policy 'N' practice still sees the 'offender' as not ordinary
'Once a criminal, always a criminal', makes many of them both tired and weary
Desistance also recognises 'false positives' 'N' pessimistic assumptions of risk.
However, those we label as 'offenders', their time involved in criminality is brisk.

**** Collaboration With Others ****

At this point in developing your ideas with young people, as was the case with graphic art, you may well wish to work with professional artists in fields such as music, drama production and theatre and so forth. You will want to think about and discuss with others whether you wish to employ your data verbalisation work face-to-face in a performance or online. This might also be in real time or recorded later – or even both.

**** Performance ****

At this stage you should have a set of ideas, words, maybe even music, sound, other visuals and so forth, that you can use to connect with diverse audiences. The time has then come to perform. This might involve, again, working with artists who can take your idea to another level, using music or through acting. Dr Glynn notes that you might want to perform the data yourself or from within the youth group. In this case, it will be important to get professional support from artistes to help you develop and hone your performance. He also notes you must know the data and the narrative behind it well. Practising your performance and ensuring it is pitched right, is enthusiastic and is received by others in the way you want, is vital. Test running the performance with a small audience can help with this. Being honest about one's capacity to be a performer of the data and get the message across is important. Within a youth group there will be some who are better at this than others, but everyone is vital in creating the material and ensuring it gets to performance.

**** Developing Impact Strategy & Evaluation ****

It is Important to develop a strategic approach to ensuring that your performance does what you need it to do and reaches out to those you want to influence through your activism – you want something to change and, therefore, you want impact. Impact relies on constant evaluation of dissemination and how one's message and performance is received. Setting up measures to monitor this, after each performance or online so you can get feedback as people download or view your material, is vital. It might be that you want to change



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something in your performance to achieve greater/higher impact. Opportunities to partner to get your message across and collaborations are likely to arise, generating greater chances for further impact and possibly other projects.



Co-Funded by
the Erasmus+ Programme of
the European Union

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein. Project Number: 2020-1-UK-01-KA227-YOU-094609



Section 5: Example of a Digital Activism Project Investigating the Methods of High-Profile Young Digital Activists

In this section we promote an activity that you could carry out with your youth group members, examining and promoting the actions of young digital activists. It is a suggestion of how you might undertake a project focusing on raising awareness of diversity in youth digital activism and is offered to spark innovation and new ideas for you to develop and implement.

There is an old anglophone saying, *if you cannot see it, you cannot be it*. However, it is probably worth taking that idiom one stage further, because if you can see it and know how it was done and have those skills, you too can do it! The visibility and profile of those young people who are changing the world is only useful if one understands how they managed to create changes. In this section, we promote the idea of youth workers, focusing with young people on youth activists they know about, value, and wish to emulate in their own interest areas. This is not about being a ‘copy-cat’, it is about harnessing the good of inspirational role models but with this providing clear routes to young people being able to replicate this. In this section, how to use digital resources to inspire youth activism through promoting role models in the field, is outlined.

This activity involves supporting young people to gather information on specific exemplars of youth digital activism with the aim of inspiration, motivation, and empowerment. It is known that there are declining levels of youth trust in government institutions and formal organisations. Moreover, the offer provided politically also does not typically align with what young people want or can relate to in their lives, leading to lower traditional forms of participation. However, issue-oriented activism is increasing through patterns of buying (or not buying quite often) and boycotting, online campaigning and protesting action, etc. As Mascheroni (2015) argues, young people are acting as actualising citizens and she explains this as: “the ‘actualizing citizen’ model favours a personalised, expressive engagement in lifestyle-related issues, loose modes of affiliation and repertoires of individualised action (Bennett, 2008; Bennett, et al., 2011)”. This is what some might term issues or interest-based activism, which has been found to be of more interest to young people in stimulating their activism. Working with youth and helping them to investigate what others have done, what kinds of issues they have engaged with and how, can facilitate greater sense of involvement, ownership and choice around becoming a digital activist.

Using the Web for Inspiring Youth Engagement through Researching and then Promoting the Issues: starting points

As with all youth work it is vital that young people feel they have a say and interest in the issues and activities undertaken. A good starting point is to get young people to identify key global youth activists themselves, and to empower them to research and develop their ideas. Within this it is imperative that cultural difference and diversity is core to work. This is in keeping with youth work values and best practice and is inclusive and welcoming to all,





whilst also supporting understanding and insight into global issues and difference, which are vital skills for young people. You could support young people to think about all kinds of activism and be broad in their investigations online.

Activity 1: mapping global activists. Working with your youth group, get the members to research youth activism through online searches. Here you can utilise regular google searches as an efficient tool to facilitate this. However, help will likely be needed to support the group to identify key search terms and, if you have a good number of young people involved, you can then get them to work in search-teams focusing on specific areas of youth activism, such as the environment, poverty and inequality, racism, abuse and exclusion, gendered violence, etc.

Searching within such areas, soon brings up key individual youth activists who are working in the field and/or have made a big impact in the past. As noted above, it is helpful to get the group to gather information on highly diverse cultural, global examples, as these will yield interesting cross-cultural comparisons, enabling discussions of similarities and differences and global issues. Here are some examples of contemporary online youth activist activity (2023):

- **Thandiwe Abdullah** (USA) – this activist helped develop a new generation of Black Rights activists through the Black Lives Matter Youth Vanguard. Active from 2015, inspired by the murder of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin and the Black Lives Matter Movement, Abdullah continues to fight for youth.
- **Sonita Alizadeh** (Afghanistan and then USA) is an Afghan rapper who took to this mode of activism to fight against the patriarchal policies of forced marriages in her home country of Afghanistan. She now advocates and fights around this issue as a global concern. Having experienced attempted forced marriage twice, Alizadeh took to rap to fight back, releasing “[Brides For Sale](#)” about the experience of women being sold into marriage by their families. Sonita, uses sound, music and You Tube to fight against forced marriage of girls and women.
- **Amika George** is an activist who used social media to effectively and successfully campaign to make the UK government ensure all those who need period products in schools can get them. She launched the campaign #freeperiods to end period poverty and to put youth menstrual poverty on the agenda. She was awarded an MBE in the Queen’s honours list in 2021 for this work. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-57443857>
- **Bye Bye Plastic Bags** is a youth-founded and led NGO based in Bali, which started in 2018. Their website outlines their work but, better than that, they offer a media kit and substantial resources around their digital methods and approaches. In particular, the way they have reached out beyond Bali to global youth communities, using digital means, is illustrative of what can be done and highly inspirational. <https://byebyeplasticbags.org/>
- **Kezang Dorji** is a popular rapper in Bhutan who began his rap work and campaigns aged 19 as a college student. At first, he performed in English but soon changed to rapping in Dzongka (his first language), Bhutan’s national language, something



unheard of previously. He raps about national identity and pride in being from Bhutan, promoting confidence in his listeners and helping to fight against drugs and hatred, promoting positive youth self-esteem and identify in his home country. Read more about Kezang on the World Learning, Education and Development Exchange website <https://www.worldlearning.org/story/meet-the-activist-using-rap-music-for-positive-social-change-in-bhutan/>

In running a project of this type, if you can, try to encourage wide examination of different youth activists who use digital means. For instance, integrate activists from Northern and Southern hemispheres, from backgrounds or heritages different to the young people you work with and/or who are involved in activist issues that do not necessarily align with those that the youth group members might ordinarily research or examine. In this way, doing research can also be a form of global activism, changing perspectives, self-development, political participation are all aspects of this development.

In addition, you can help young people to focus on individual youth activists themselves, or movements that they have created and that now have wider force or that have inspired others. For instance, for inspiration one could study Greta Thunberg's digital activism techniques and strategies, or the movement and action spin-offs that have arisen from her work, such as the *Fridays for Future* strikes.

To showcase the material your youth group members have gathered on the work of youth activists who operate in the digital sphere, you might want to employ any of the techniques discussed above. For instance:

- Digital story telling could be used to link aspects of their work to that of young people in your area. This could be used to show how diverse stories and lived experiences interlink, even across diverse cultures.
- Emancipatory poetry could be utilised to bring the issues alive emotionally and using the digital poetry can be written and performed to increase impact.
- Animation could be introduced, developed with young people as creators, to represent the issues online in an easily understandable and appealing format.
- Graphic art, enabling young people to be involved in designing and creating the web resources, along with other visual materials, could be developed to reach out to audiences, using colours, designs, and memes attractive to your target groups. This is particularly important in reaching out to other young people using relevant cultural symbols, ideas, and experiences.
- Data verbalisation, using rapping or other techniques could be used to bring the messages of your investigations alive, to personalise and humanise your messages around youth digital activism issues.



Conclusion

Creativity and innovation are vital components of all contemporary youth work. Digital youth work offers the opportunity to 'change things up' and be innovative using new techniques. As noted above, you may need to partner or collaborate with other groups and individuals to ensure you have the physical resources and skills and competencies to undertake certain types of digital youth work around activism. Planning, reach out to others, looking into funding streams (see the next toolkit for ideas and advice on this) and sometimes training yourself up using online and other resources, might be necessary. However, there is much to gain, and the rewards are high for utilising the digital for youth activism work.





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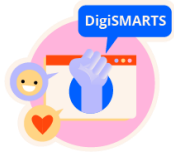
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