INNOVATOR

FLIPPED STUDIO "SUCCESSFUL INNOVATOR" - NOVA

Project No. 2020-1-LT01-KA227-ADU-094751

Performing theatre through "Minecraft" video game

Creator of the good practice, country: Middle School Drama Teacher, Artist and Director Susie Lawrence, Unites States of America

Sector: Games & Multi-media

Type of business / employment: Employee

Achievements in CCS before the Pandemic

Since a very young age Susie Lawrence had a strong connection with theatre. She was a part of a drama program at High School and attended summer training programs on arts and theatre. Susie graduated university in 2013 and since then worked with the renowned Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey as an apprentice and performed professionally with the Shakespeare Festival of St. Louis, Ozark Actors Theatre, and Stray Dog Theatre. She is also a teaching artist directing productions at various schools. Susie has a passion for productions of Shakespeare as according to her "the beauty in Shakespeare's plays is that while they are old and sometimes problematic, they revolve around such common themes and human conflicts that we can almost always make them relatable". Therefore, Susie makes an effort to produce productions based on Shakespeare and thinks of innovative ways of introducing the productions to students and general public.

Photo by cottonbro from Pexels. Source: https://www.pexels.com/photo/group-of-people-sitting-on-chair-on-stage-6896181/

Susie has also used innovative educational tools before – "I have been using Minecraft: Education Edition in my classroom for the past few years, having students create scenic designs for class projects, so I knew it was possible to create a pretty sophisticated design scheme".

Challenges faced during the Pandemic and innovative solutions to overcome them

As Susie was producing a play based on Shakespeare for a college preparatory school in the year of 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic necessitated shutdowns and some other plays of hers had to be cancelled she knew that she would have to dramatically reimagine the production. Although Susie knew that they could do a reading over Zoom for the play – but she really wanted to recreate the action, movement, and artistry that comes with live theatre therefore she pushed herself to find innovative ways for the production.

Photo by JESHOOTS.com from Pexels. Source: https://www.pexels.com/photo/two-people-holding-black-gaming-consoles-442576/

Susie has been gaming for years and Covid-19 has made her spend even more time online playing video games with friends. As she saw a practice of a work group which met up in a video game - created avatar characters, met with one another in their virtual world, and communicated using Discord – Susie thought to herself "why couldn't I do the same thing with students, and put on our play within a video game?".

As an innovative solution Susie has chosen video game "Minecraft" for the play as it is a program that was easily accessible by students, had lots of resources for scenic design team to build with, and something that was safe and family-friendly. In this way the production was to be safe and design artists could be involved by creating an entire world online, accessible from anywhere.

All auditions, rehearsals, and callbacks were held remotely on Zoom platform. Students building the "Minecraft" play set were supervised by other teachers and during the actual performance the actors were able to voice act while controlling their avatar character. As Susie concludes "for my cast and crew, I wanted to expose them to a new form of entertainment and communication – we even had our "cast party" online in Discord! That socialization and play were so important to them, and I was thrilled to see them bonding even though

Photo by Alexander Kovalev from Pexels. Source: https://www.pexels.com/photo/flat-screen-computer-monitor-3977908/

we weren't physically together. For the audience, my goal was to present them with a theatrical experience they had never seen before and broaden their minds of what theatre can be".

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Photo by Andrea Piacquadio from Pexels.
Source:https://www.pexels.com/photo/city-man-couple-people-4814732/

Conditions for the innovativeness and success

In the practice described it is essential to have an access to digital tools such as Zoom, "Minecraft" or other. Some people who are familiar with the programs and their technical aspects are also required to supervise the students or anyone else involved in digitalization of such performance. However, tools used in the practice are free and many opportunities to learn how to use them are also available on the internet therefore it is highly accessible.

Sources:

- https://thetheatretimes.com/minecraft-plays-in-covid-times-with-director-artist-susie-lawrence/ (Link to the interview with Susie Lawrence)
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IbYmikkm6S0 (Link to the created play)

Self-reflection questions

1. Would it be possible to adapt this good practice to any of my own challenges during or post COVID-19?

2. In what other ways could theatre plays be performed during circumstances such as COVID-19?

This good practice story is prepared by Social Innovation fund.