EMPOWERING CREATORS

Don't just play games, build your own!

We spend so much time each day consuming information and media through screens, in fact you're reading this on a screen right now! But how many hours in a day do you spend using technology to consume what others have already made? Technology is for everyone so it only makes sense that everyone has a say in getting opportunities to create.

Let's use technology for good to empower young people to become creators and develop skills for any future. By creating opportunities to create and design things like games, apps and videos, young people are challenged to push themselves and build new skills with a focus on computational thinking.

When we talk about computational thinking, we're thinking about problem solving being at the heart of everything we do. Starting off by breaking the problem down to consider what we have done before that is similar and starting to create a list of steps we can take towards creating a solution - also known as an algorithm in computing science.

Problem solving isn't a skill that is specific to any field or career, it's a skill that can be used and adapted to any walk of life that you go through. We want young people to grow up to become individuals who are independent thinkers and don't panic when they come across something they haven't done or seen before but instead use their experiences and problem solving skills to work through a solution.

But how do we create these opportunities where young people can run with their ideas and take the lead in their learning, exploring and making? Here are some of my top tips to get started with creating environments and experiences for young people to start creating projects that let them take the lead in using technology for good.z

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FIND PROJECTS THAT ALIGN WITH YOUNG PEOPLE'S INTERESTS

There is no better way to engage and excite people about a project than relating it to what they are interested in. Giving young people the opportunity to decide on the theme for their project can be a really powerful way to get everyone committed to spending time and working through challenges because they can see the benefit that their project could have.

Even if you want all young people in your group to be looking at creating a video game, open it up enough so that each team has a say on the kind of game or the theme of the game they are creating so that they can start to lead their own learning and development.

ENCOURAGE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SHARING & GIVING FEEDBACK

Sometimes when we're working on projects, we can hit a wall and feel unsure about where to take it next. This is where taking some time out from creating to sharing our ideas and pitching them to others can be really helpful to let us see reactions from others about what is being created.

Create some checkpoints throughout the projects where young people need to share their idea/creation with another person or team in the room and allow for some time for receiving feedback. This lets everyone take a moment to reflect on what they have created so far, be proud of what they have done and start to gather ideas for next steps.

SET A TIMEFRAME FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO WORK TOWARDS

It can be so tempting to let teams keep working on their projects for what feels like forever but sometimes having a little bit more structure in terms of how many weeks or hours we are spending on a project can be a real motivator to getting things done.

When setting a timeframe for the projects, be mindful of how much your group can achieve in the time to balance what can be done with running out of motivation for a project and agreeing when it's time to try something new.

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EXPLORE REAL-WORLD EXAMPLES AND PRODUCTS

A lot of the time, young people don't realise that the different tasks they are completing as part of their project are real-world jobs and careers. For example, if you're making mobile apps, not only are there people on the team who write the code to create the app but there are also teams of designers who think about where to place buttons and consider how people are going to use the app so that they can make it as simple as possible to use.

A quick search on youtube will bring up so many different videos from companies across the world that showcases some of the careers and roles that are part of a tech team to let young people see links between what they are doing and what happens in industry.

You could also send out a request through STEM Ambassadors to find a live opportunity for someone working in this area to come along and chat with young people about what they do!

ENCOURAGE CREATING FOR FUN!

Sometimes we can get stuck in the mindset that we have to be productive all of the time so what we create needs to have a purpose and we forget that it's okay to create and tinker for fun! Creating and making for fun can be a really nice way to try out different platforms or materials that we haven't used before and along with creating plenty of things that will fall over and not work how we expected, they might also spark some really cool ideas along the way!

Resources to try out and explore

Padlet
Sharing ideas across the group to give everyone an opportunity to share their ideas and opinions

WAKELET
Create an online portfolio highlighting the progress of projects and share what has been done so far

GOOGLE JAMBOARDS
An online whiteboard where everyone can collaborate and draw together

CANVA
Create beautiful logos and infographics to bring ideas to life

There are so many fantastic tools that are available online and a lot of them are free to get started with but remember that sometimes nothing beats a big bit of paper and pens or pencils for a group to get around to start sharing ideas!

Happy Creating!

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