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MEDIA Digi

„Education for Media Literacy in Digital Environment“ project

PRACTICAL GUIDE ON ORGANISING FOCUS GROUP

HOW TO CONDUCT AN EFFECTIVE FOCUS GROUP TO FOLLOW UP THE MEDIADIGI PROJECT

... AND ANALYSE DATA.

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VALUE OF EUROPEAN KNOWLEDGE

Value of European Knowledge
North Macedonia

Centre for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities
Bulgaria

Utenos Adolfo Šapokos gymnasia
Lithuania

Contents

About 5
Purpose 5
Focus group preparations 6
Size 6
Composition 6
Duration 6
Location 6
Materials 7
Implementation of a focus group 8
Role of the facilitator 8
Format 9
Ground rules 9
Confidentiality 10
Asking questions 10
Data analysis 12
Step 1 - Organising the data 12
Step 2 - Analysing the data 12
An example focus group analysis spreadsheet 13
Report presentation 14

About

The purpose of this guide is to provide tips for, practical tips, how to conduct an effective focus group to follow up the Medi@Digi project and analyse data. All planed trainings with students in „Medi@Digi“ project will be applied as Work in Focus Group (WFG). Focus groups will be formed in order of apply qualitative research aimed at exploring narratives and trends in perceptions of a group of selected participants. Focus groups will be range in size up to 12 participants.

Each focus group activity is a small-group discussion guided by a trained leader/facilitator. It will be used to learn more about opinions of youth media literacy and to develop critical thinking trough their exchange of information. It will be guide for development of own attitudes in future action. The group's composition and the group discussion will be carefully planned to create a nonthreatening environment, so that participants feel free to talk openly and give honest opinions. Since participants will be actively encouraged to not only express their own opinions, but also to respond to other members and questions posed by the leader, focus groups will offer a depth, nuance, and variety to the discussion that would not be available through surveys. Additionally, because focus groups are structured and directed, they will yield a lot of information in a relatively short time. In short, focus groups is a good way to gather in-depth information about a community’s thoughts and opinions on a particular topic.

The selected participants from each partner institution will be involved in three (one per partner organization) trainings on local level.
One training will be organized in Macedonia by „VEZ“. There will be involved 12 selected students as focus group (4 from each partner).
One training will be organized in Bulgaria by „CEISEM “. There will be involved 12 selected students as focus group (4 from each partner).
One training will be organized in Lithuania by „A. Sapoka“. There will be involved 12 selected students as focus group (4 from each partner).
At all trainings, training materials and exercises about development of media literacy will be used. There, participants will be trained for methods for building of critical thinking.

Undertaking focus groups will help your school to communicate Medi@Digi project goals to students and/or other stakeholders and to inform future action planning in light of the currents state of play identified from the discussions. This process will provide a structure on how to consult with students to better understand the types of fake news and media trends they may be exposed to, and strategies and controls for ensuring effective management of identified media developments.

Purpose

Focus groups are ideal for consultation with students, and enable the collection of rich information about individual’s perceptions of their media environment. There are several reasons for using focus groups as a base for follow-up to the Medi@Digi goals and activities, including:

- to obtain more detailed information and insight into fake news and media trends of importance to the school and its students
- to better understand the opinions and issues of students regarding their media environment and the data relevance
- to establish a safe and open environment for students to express their views about the Medi@Digi project goals
- to provide a broad representation of diverse ideas and experiences on the topic
- to generate strategies and solutions for addressing fake news and media trends in the future

Focus group preparations

It is important to be planned and organised in delivering focus groups to ensure that you get accurate and practical information from your participants. The following considerations will help to ensure your focus group is set up for success.

Size

A focus group needs to be large enough to generate ideas, but not too big that participants feel overwhelmed by the size of the group or do not get the opportunity to make a contribution to the discussion. However, if the group is too small, there can be less energy and a lack of diversity in experiences. Thus, the ideal size for a focus group is six to 12 participants. Typically, if the focus group exceeds 12, the facilitator will find it increasingly difficult to manage the time and group dynamics.

Composition

Focus groups designed to understand and explore survey responses are usually conducted in teams or workgroups. Thus, more often than not, participants may already know each other, same school, class, neighbourhood and/or may belong to mutual social group. However, there also is an opportunity to change the dynamic of the focus group through cross-team participation, thereby creating a mix of participants with different backgrounds and experiences. The approach that is best for creation of participative culture, team dynamics, and facilitator experience. Intact teams/workgroups could be selected if the consultation is only relevant for one area, or a thorough consultation is required (with every major workgroup participating). Forming focus groups from a representative sample of students across teams can speed up the data collection process, but may require extra facilitation skill to develop relationship between members and promote open discussions.

Duration

The duration of a focus group can influence the credibility of the process. The ideal time is 60 to 90 minutes. Sessions that are shorter are unlikely to delve into issues in a meaningful way and if they are longer, participants will become fatigued or bored, withdrawing from the conversation. Facilitator set up time is not included in the 60 to 90 minutes. Thus, it is best to arrive early to prepare the room and ensure that any audio/visual equipment is in working order. Participants should be asked to arrive five to 10 minutes before the session in order to get settled, enabling the most effective use of time.

Location

It is important to consider the message the location of the focus group sends to participants. Is it too small for the number of attendees? Is there sufficient lighting to keep participants energised? Is there access to audio/visual equipment? Will the room provide adequate privacy for participants to openly express their views? Will the focus group be held onsite or offsite (which, of course, will depend on the culture of the school and budget)? The ideal seating plan for a focus group is a U-Shape or a circle, preferably without a table acting as a physical barrier.

Materials

The facilitator should effectively prepare for the focus group by arranging for the following materials:

- **Name tags** - it is a good idea if participants do not know each other. It is worth exercising some caution in having participants identify themselves. Contributions to discussion should be confidential; participants may feel more open to participating if they know their names aren't being recorded against comments they make.

- **Notepads and pens** - it is good to make use of notepads (or butcher paper or sticky notes) if the facilitator feels that participants are reluctant or nervous about speaking up, or if the conversation is becoming stale. Participants can individually (or in pairs) write down ideas for group discussion and these can be displayed on the wall. This strategy can help to energise the group.

- **Clock** - a clock is very important for time management. Make sure you place the clock in your field of view so that group rapport can be maintained.

- **Refreshments** - whether food and/or beverages are provided will depend on 'how things are usually done' in the school and budget constraints. Be careful to ensure that refreshments do not become distracting to the task at hand. One approach is to provide lunch or morning/afternoon meal (before or after the focus group), both as a thank-you to participants for their input and to encourage social interaction/continued discussion.

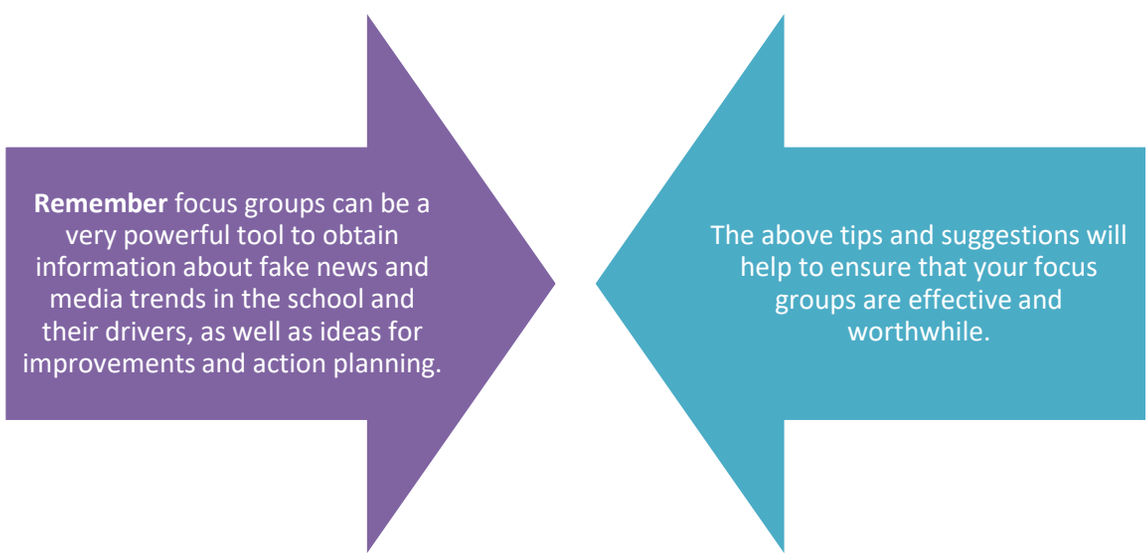
Implementation of a focus group

Implementing focus groups might initially seem difficult, particularly if the facilitator doesn't have previous experience conducting such processes. Planning and school can help to ensure things go smoothly, as the facilitator can focus on the discussion and not become distracted by things that might have been missed. The following considerations will help to manage your focus group in order to elicit the best possible input from participants.

Role of the facilitator

The facilitator should be a member external to the team (e.g. a representative from the pedagogical staff, a teacher or senior student from another team, or an external consultant). It is not always necessary to invite consultants or external parties to conduct these sessions as long as the chosen person can remain objective and refrain from influencing the discussion or outcomes.
The facilitator needs to have good observation and listening skills and has a very important role in:

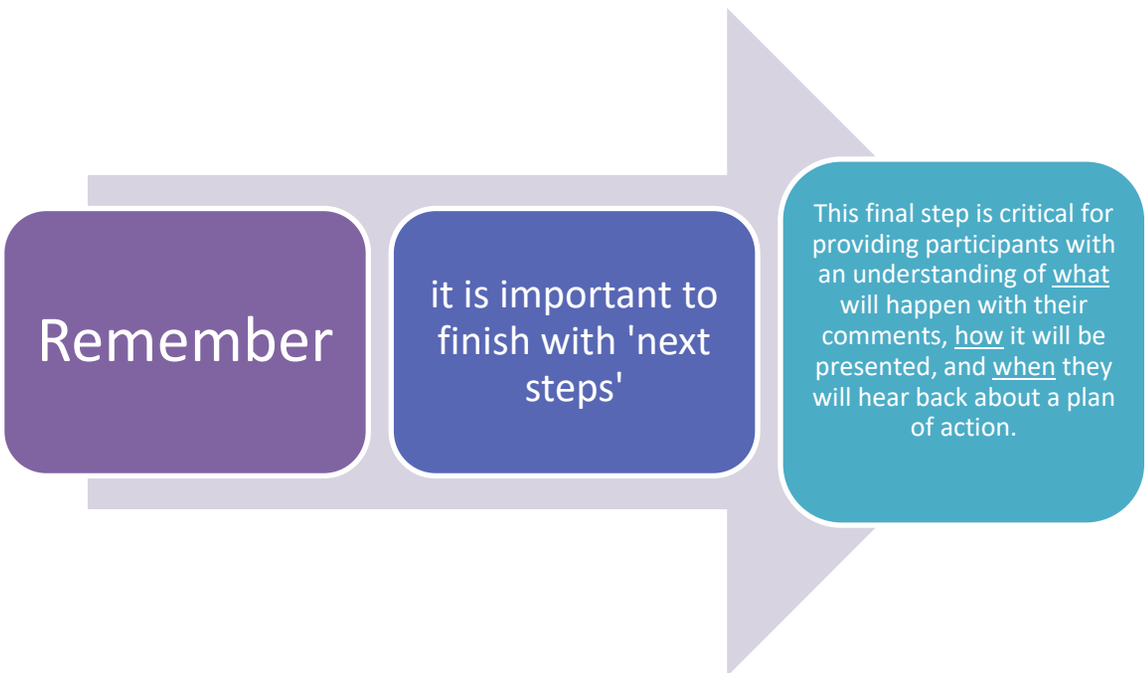
- setting ground rules for group behaviour
- managing the time available
- ensuring all questions are covered
- attending to group dynamics and managing any conflicts or disagreements that may occur
- ensuring each participant has the opportunity to speak
- keeping the discussion on topic
- reassuring participants that their confidentiality will be maintained
- providing appropriate feedback to management.



Format

The facilitator should introduce the session, purpose, and expected outcomes. A brief recap of the Medi@Digi project goals should then be provided to participants to ensure everyone is starting with the same level of knowledge (although it is important to ensure that all participants have received a written overview of the Medi@Digi project goals well before the focus group). A suggested format for the discussion to follow includes:

- introductions
- ground rules
- confidentiality
- review of Medi@Digi project goals
- questioning including:
    - engagement questions, exploration questions, exit questions
    - questions to avoid summary of themes
    - next steps.



Ground rules

When setting the scene for the focus group, the facilitator should make the following points:

- as a courtesy to all participants and to limit distractions, ask participants to please switch off or turn to silent all mobile telephones and other devices.
- advise participants that there are no right or wrong answers, only opinions and it is important to respect each individual's opinion. While it is appropriate to disagree in a respectful manner, it is counterproductive to criticise or put down another person for expressing their views. One way to do this is to use "I" statements, where you say "I hear what you are saying, but I think" rather than "you're wrong".
- to ensure that all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally and feel heard and respected, remind participants to not interrupt someone while they are speaking.
- it is important to inform participants that finger pointing and blaming should be avoided; we are here to address the issue, not an individual.

Confidentiality

All responses and opinions expressed in the focus group should remain confidential. The facilitator has a responsibility to ensure the privacy of participants. The facilitator should inform participants that their responses will be documented (via note-taking) but that their names will be never be recorded in relation to specific issues or direct quotes, or any reports arising from the focus groups. The facilitator should explain to participants how the focus group data will be used and with whom it will be shared. Such procedures will help to alleviate concerns relating to confidentiality and using the results to single out specific individuals.

Participants themselves also have the responsibility of respecting the privacy of their fellow participants and should, therefore, be requested not to repeat what they hear during the focus group outside of the session.

Asking questions

Questioning is the most important tool the focus group facilitator will use, as this is the method required to obtain relevant information from participants. The facilitator should prepare a list of questions prior to the focus group. The questions should be open-ended and start general to encourage participant involvement and then move towards more specific questioning. Here are some examples of the types of questions that are effective in focus groups:

Engagement questions

These questions elicit factual responses and are non-threatening. Such questions also can be good ice-breakers to get participants talking. For example:

- *Has anyone participated in a focus group before?*
- *How was the experience for you?*
- *What worked well or not so well?*

Exploration questions

These questions provide an opportunity to get more specific, introduce dedicated questions, and explore answers more thoroughly. For example:

- *As highlighted in the psychosocial risk assessment report for your workgroup, 'role overload' was found to be quite high. Can you tell me about your experiences with role overload?*
- *How can you tell if members in your team are feeling under time pressure?*
- *What do you think are the reasons for this finding?*
- *What are some of the things this school can do to address fake news?*

It also is a good idea for the facilitator to ensure that the glossary of terms for digital media, fake news and media trends is available during the focus group (found in the report), so that participants can be reminded about the meaning for each individual and their personal view.

Exit questions

These questions help to ensure the facilitator has not missed important issues and that all participants have had their say. For example:

- *Does anybody have anything else toad?*
- *Have I missed any key issues you would like to discuss?*

Questions to avoid

Leading questions: these give direction and the desired answer, for example:

- *So, do you agree that…?*
- *How bad was it that…?*
- *How could he/she say that…?*
- *Would you say that…?*

Value-Laden Questions: emotionally charged words should be avoided, for example:

Should students be forced to…?

Should media demand…?

Some examples of emotionally charged words include blame, claim, demand, fair, ignore, force, coerce, insist, unreasonable, unhelpful, and purport.

Double-barrelled questions: *have you ever… and what was it like?* Separate the question into two parts.

NOTE!

It is recommended that there is a scribe present so the information and rich content are recorded in writing and the facilitator can focus on the questioning and group dynamics. However, it also is recommended that, as soon as possible after the focus group, the facilitator takes the time to reflect by creating his or her own set of written notes.

Data analysis

The section below outlines a simple, yet very effective method for making sense of the data collected during focus groups.

It is critical that the scribe transcribes the data electronically as soon as possible after each focus group to ensure information is not forgotten. The facilitator should then record his or her notes into the database too, and both should meet to ensure they agree on the content. The entire focus group conversation does not need to be recorded word for word; however, it is useful to ensure some 'quotes' are collected.

Step 1 - Organising the data

1. **Create an Excel spreadsheet.**
2. **To ensure participant confidentiality, allocate each participant a number (e.g., Nikolas White = P1; Ana West = P2; Bob Right = P3, and so on). Remember, it is very important that the names of participants are not recorded in this document.**
3. **Label four columns as (1) participant Code, (2) participant Comments, (3) category,and (4) sub-category.**
4. **Insert each pre-prepared focus group question (and any other topics that emerged) in separate rows.**
5. **Underneath each focus group question, type the comments received (or quotes) into a separate line in the order in which they were said, labelling each one with the relevant participant code.**

Step 2 - Analysing the data

1. **Read through the entire spreadsheet to get a feel for the issues. Then, focus on each focus group question in turn. Be on the lookout for common categories, themes, and patterns, as well as unexpected comments or surprises.**
2. **Decide on the common themes in the data and assign them a category name (e.g. Media Literacy). These are broad categories and a good place to start.**
3. **Make a list of these categories at the top of the spreadsheet and allocate them a code (e.g., FN = fake news).**
4. **Taking each comment in turn, assign it a category code.**
5. **As you label with these categories, you may start to find the categories are broad and could be broken down into further themes (e.g., the issue of critical thinking could be a sub-category of the broader theme of media literacy).**
6. **As these sub-categories emerge, also add these to the top of the spreadsheet, assigning them a code as you go along (e.g. Media Literacy , access to media content =ML-a).**
7. **Excel allows you to sort using your categories or sub-categories to identity the most/least common issues (in terms of frequency), common expressions among themes, and any patterns for eachparticipant.**

An example focus group analysis spreadsheet

FocusGroupName: High school
Date: 01/04/2019
Location: Conference Room1

Categories	Code	Sub-categories	Code
Media Literacy	ML	Access to diverse media content	**ML – a**
Media Literacy	ML	Inform yourself about media environment	**ML – i**
Fake news	FN	Who is posting this information?	**FN – w**
Fake news	FN	Author? Who has created this information?	**FN – a**
Fake news	FN	Source of information?	**FN - s**
Content	CO	Google the topic	**CO – g**
Content	CO	What do other sources say about this topic?	**CO – w**
Critical Thinking	**CT**	**Quality of information**	**CT – q**

Participant Code	Comment	Category	Sub-category
Question 1 - ***Can you tell me about your experiences with social media? Do you read news articles from social media?***			
P3	I find it hard to focus on information presented on social media , as I always read only the titles but never the entire text.	CT	**CT – q**
P1	From my point of view, I think it is better to ignore, because there is so many different articles	ML	**ML – a**
P2	Agree with P1, I am constantly ignoring most of them, but I always trust BBC posts	FN	**FN – w**
P6	It really comes down to the fact that you can easily google anything if it's interesting to know	CO	**CO – g**
P4	The biggest time waster for me is when I receive mixed messages forsame event on different media sources as they are speaking about something completely different.	CO	**CO – w**
Question 2 - ***What are some of the things this school can do to address media literacy?***			
P6	Temporary increases of class discussions about media environment at school would be helpful.	ML	**ML – i**
P3	Better knowledge of basic elements of media information so we can increase our ability to access reliable data	ML	**ML – a**
P2	Better knowledge for students how tocheck of information source	FN	**FN - s**
P4	**Teachers need to be on the same page in terms of critical thinking about quality of media information.**	**CT**	**CT– q**

Report presentation

Focus group report should be presented to the participants. For teachers, the best approach is to summarise the categories and provide powerful comments as justification of the categories. Adding quotes also helps to give life and meaning to the report.
However, ensure these comments cannot be traced back to an individual. If several focus groups are conducted across departments or workgroups, it can be worthwhile to compare the results across different focus groups to identify patterns.

Remember surveys and focus groups lose their credibility and meaning if participants:

- do not see the results of their efforts
- do not see any action from the results.

- An action plan is a useful way of bringing all the information together from the focus group sessions in an effort to guide future actions. It is a collaborative process that describes the steps that managers and students will complete in order to help maximise the success of proposed intervention. It includes the identification of specific actions that will be undertaken as well as the timeframes for these actions, and the monitoring and review processes that will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the actions.