

The Hybrid Working Modules during and Post-Pandemic: A Case Study of Accessible Arts and Media

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Abstract: Accessible Arts and Media (AAM) is a charity that works in York and the surrounding areas to teach the arts and creative media to individuals with disabilities and mental illness. It has forced to move all of its sessions online ever since the COVID-19 epidemic emerged in the UK in 2020. Zoom sessions replaced Facebook Live sessions as the primary online delivery method in the autumn of the same year. One of the interesting things that emerges from the format of the AAM events mentioned above is that for some reasons the AAM has retained the Hands&Voices online participation route after the pandemic has ended. Why is this hybrid model of events being held both online and offline only used in this one project? This study investigates the operation of online and hybrid music activities in Accessible Music and Media. Based on a summary of AAM's experience of events from the pandemic outbreak to the present day, this study uses online research data, interview data and literature findings to explain why, of the many events, AAM has developed a hybrid model only for Hands&Voices. The conclusions drawn are that: the hybrid model can provide a regular social occasion for participants; the content of Hands&Voices events is specific; the hybrid model can better realise the principle of inclusivity in community music and increase participation of members; and because of the uniqueness of the Hands&Voices audience.

1. Introduction

Accessible Arts and Media (AAM) [1] is a charity that works in York and the surrounding areas to teach the arts and creative media to individuals with disabilities and mental illness. It has forced to move all of its sessions online ever since the COVID-19 epidemic emerged in the UK in 2020. Zoom sessions replaced Facebook Live sessions as the primary online delivery method in the autumn of the same year. AAM developed the IMUSE[2] at Home kit during the pandemic to give remote internet sessions for participants trapped at home and brought participants to events like Igen's singing and signing workshops in response to the problem of being unable to meet in person. As the pandemic subsided in 2021, all initiatives with the exception of Hands&Voices went back to offline meetings. In 2022, AAM created a hybrid model for Hands&Voices in which meetings take place both online and offline.

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that for some reasons the AAM has retained the Hands&Voices online participation route after the pandemic has ended. Why is this hybrid model of events being held both online and offline only used in this one project? This study investigates the operation of online and hybrid music activities in Accessible Music and Media. It aims to present the motivations of community music organisations when continuing their online music activities after the pandemic. It examines whether there are particular issues when working with disabled people which make continued online delivery methods necessary in order for organisations to be practice inclusivity.

This study was carried out using the methodology described in Figure 1 below, which involves first conducting document research to learn about the current state of academic study in the field, followed by using data from Hands&Voices activities to develop research questions and create an interview outline. Second, information directly from Hands&Voices managers was gathered via the interview. Finally, using Grounded theory to code the interview text, the reasons for the emergence of mixed patterns in this project are explained.

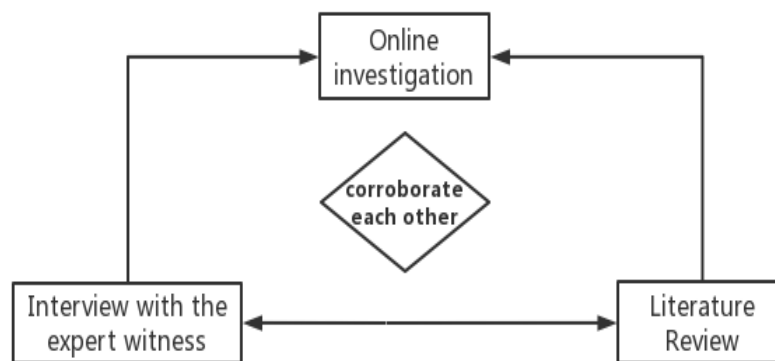


Figure 1: The avenues of this research

2. Literature Review

Online choir theory and practise have been developed from the very beginning. In 2002, Daugherty in the USA suggested that the popularity of the internet in the 21st century would create the conditions for online learning for choirs. In 2009, Dell created an online choir for the MTV Awards. Online conversations and music and video file sharing have become possible, according to O'Flynn (2015)[3], with the rise in mobile device users, the development of 5G technology, and the emergence of social media platforms like Facebook. Additionally, this has significantly altered how community musicians work. The goal of inclusivity in community music is frequently best achieved by organizers by using a 'open door' strategy. All face-to-face choral activities had to be terminated once the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in the UK in 2020, and many of them were shifted online. This is shown in academic research, where the number of studies in this field peaks around 2021. Figure 2 below displays a graph of the number of publications versus the year of publication for literature found in the Web of Science with the topic 'online choir'. It is evident that the pandemic served as a significant spur for online community music initiatives. Many organisations, such Soundabout Inclusive Choirs and AAM, kept their online presence after the epidemic was over, allowing members to attend events simultaneously online and offline. This created a hybrid model of events held both online and offline.

Studies on online choirs conducted during the epidemic time examined their working principles and effects. They generally selected a specific online choir and conducted a questionnaire survey

among the participants to get research data. These studies all came to the same conclusion: online choirs can be an excellent addition to face-to-face choirs. Online choral singing has the potential to significantly improve participants' social involvement and overall well-being. For example, Leipe's (2021)[4] study of an amateur community choir in Scotland demonstrates that 'both face-to-face and online group singing rehearsal' modes have positive impacts in different ways, advocating the use of both modes to meet the 'individual singers' needs and aspirations'[4]. Fekete (2022)[5] concludes that online rehearsals can reduce social isolation through a response to a Hungarian aphasia choir during a pandemic. Online choirs and beneficial mindfulness interventions can both enhance well-being, according to a study by Herschel (2022)[6] on the topic of online choir and well-being among older-aged adults in the United States. All of these studies offer helpful advice for community music organisations that want to keep their online presence after the pandemic.

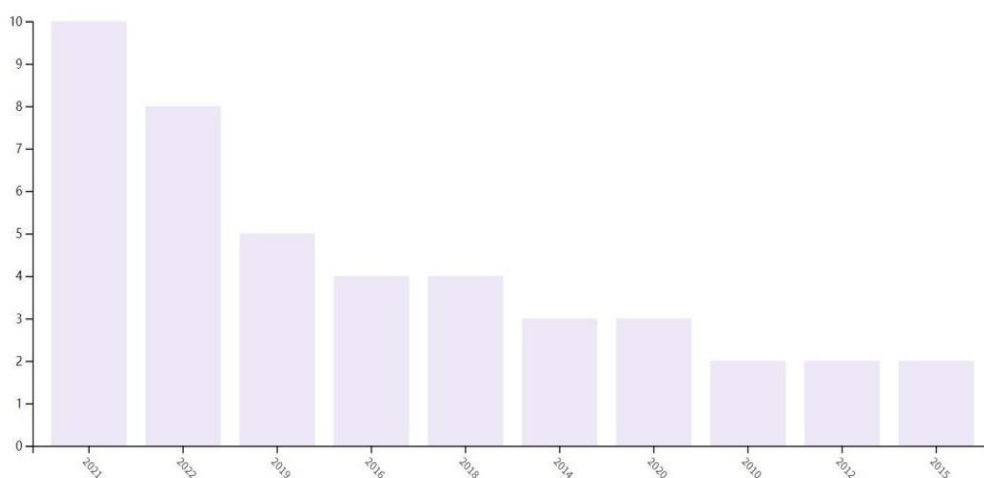


Figure 2: Table showing the number of relevant publications over time (from Web of Science)

However, the creation of something new inevitably brings new challenges. Some of the literature has put forwards the issues that arise when hosting online community music events. The main points are, Igra (2020)[7] through his own online teaching practices came to the conclusion that online education is a brand-new field and that teachers need greater patience when dealing with emotionally upset students on the other end of the phone. Maxfield (2020)[8] found that the quality of the audio and video received in the online workshop was not guaranteed to have the same fidelity as when it was recorded and was not accepted as timely, while these online operations were challenging for both participants and organizers. Datta (2020)[9] raised a similar concern about the lack of mutual coordination between participants in online activities to respond to the emotions of the music as in face-to-face and expression. Reasonable arguments are used to support these opinions. There is, however, a lack of a systematic and thorough understanding of the problems that online choirs encounter. Some of the conclusions also lack the validity for this study due to the various audiences they were presented to. Meanwhile, most of these studies review the ways in which online choirs are practised and their impact, but hybrid models that combine online and offline are less often discussed. The small amount of literature involved, such as Pulham's (2019)[10] study of a blended learning (BL) model for university choirs, attempted to construct a BL curriculum. Enabling the combination of online and face-to-face education to save rehearsal time, improve learning outcomes, and provide a personalized learning experience.

Based on the outcomes and shortcomings of the above-mentioned studies, this study will explore, as fully as possible, the reasons for the emergence of hybrid patterns. It will supplement the body of knowledge on choirs for people with disabilities and provide a reference for setting up the subsequent

AAM events.

3. Methodology

This study attempts to determine why a charity choir for individuals with disabilities has used various measures for different activities in the return of offline operations. The methodology of this study belongs to the category of interpretivism, which emphasizes ‘only through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, and instruments’. Therefore the study of social issues requires an emphasis on the understanding of language and the summation of patterns.

The data for this study were collected through internet data research, expert interviews, and literature review. In order to explain why only Hands&Voices uses the hybrid model in all of AAM's activities, the first step was to summarize the experience of AAM's activities through research on online resources. The main reason for this approach is that AAM, an inclusive arts charity, actively publishes information about its initiatives to the public and publishes a wide range of statistics regarding the organisation's efficacy, making it simple to acquire this information online. Additionally, since the start of the epidemic, a lot of events have needed to be advertised and held online, thus enriching the online material for this study. I will collect the interview questions pertaining to the hybrid model after gaining a thorough understanding of AAM's operations. This is followed by an interview with AAM's project manager (For reasons of anonymity, the interviewees will be replaced by A in the following), to gain his experience of the Hands&Voices hybrid model. As an expert witness, A is in charge of managing Hands&Voices operations in AAM. Therefore, his view of the hybrid model has considerable credibility. The validity and accuracy of the results of the online data research can once more be confirmed by using qualitative data from multiple sources to illustrate the problems that the study needs to address. Finally, I will use the literature analysis method to summarize the findings of other online or hybrid choral programmes facing to people with disabilities or learning disabilities covered in the literature, to identify similarities and differences between the findings of the research, to further the research and to confirm the validity of the findings.

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of York Ethics Committee and consent was completed by the interview participants. The entirety of the data was analyzed using triangulation theory and Grounded theory. The processes of the Grounded theory analysis were: identifying and recording important sentences from the material that were relevant to the question; enhancing the primary ideas in the sentences to create tertiary codes. All the tertiary codes were sorted and combined to further refine them into secondary codes. Finally, these are combined using a certain logic (primary coding) to create a convincing chain of evidence. Based on this finding, Denzin's (1970) methodological triangulation was used to determine whether the findings from the study of the three different data sources — internet data, interview data, and literature data—could be corroborated by each other. This is to guarantee that the conclusions are accurate.

4. Results

4.1 Online research results

The AAM has made public the content and effectiveness of the activities of all its online projects. Between the end of March and mid-August 2020 alone, the relevant videos have been viewed more than 13,500 times on the internet [11]. According to a questionnaire on online activities conducted by the AAM, 100% of people think that online courses are very good quality, make them feel happy, have a voice in meetings and make them more creative at home. 82% of people think that online courses allow them to get in touch with friends and help them to focus better. In addition, 70% felt

that online courses helped them to use their electronic equipment better. According to the text feedback from participants (shown in Figure 3 below), the online meeting approach was an influential way to keep everyone connected. According to the word cloud of people's opinions on online sessions (Figure 4 below), participants generally gave high marks to online sessions during the pandemic.

In the hybrid mode, according to AAM, all those who cannot be physically present will also be able to participate deeply in the event. Before the start of each Hands&Voices session, members of the online and offline community are greeted separately, while Zoom meetings and projectors ensure that participants are able to keep an audio-visual connection with each other. In the presentation for the 2020 York Mumbler Love Local 'Virtual Class, Activity or Event' Award, participants commented that Hands&Voices' virtual classes were dynamic and fun. A was able to bring all the participants together well and lead the music to counteract the isolation of the blockade period, allowing the participants to reconnect. This familiar social connection gives the participants a sense of safety.

'Because everything stopped and it's so nice to be connected.' Karen

'So important. That's how we've got through lockdown, it's provided routine, consistency, something to look forward to.' Leeann

'She would have lost all connections without them.' Mandy

Figure 3: AAM participants' feedback (from the AAM website)



Figure 4: A word cloud of people's opinions on online sessions (from the AAM website)

5. Interview Results

Through literature and preliminary online information research, there were five questions in this expert interview, which were:

- 1) Why was the online access to Hands and Voices retained after the pandemic, while other activities (such as IMP and iMuse) reverted to offline entirely?
- 2) Do you think that retaining online access is a necessary initiative for people with disabilities?
- 3) Are there any ongoing problems linked to online delivery (such as distance or latency) and if so how have these affected participation?
- 4) What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of a hybrid model compared to a purely online or offline activity?
- 5) From your point of view, has the hybrid model contributed to the spread of the project?

Based on the expert witness interviews, the responses to the questions were distilled and coded using the research methodology of Grounded theory, resulting in the coding shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Grounded theory analysis of the hybrid model (from interview data)

Level 1 Code	Level 2 Code	Level 3 Code	Evidence
Responding to organizational objectives	Increasing the sense of involvement	Increasing interaction between online and offline participants	“It is a very sociable group and so by being a hybrid model still allows the participants to have that social element in their lives. ”
Special features of the event	Differences in the specific content of activities	Choral singing is more likely to spread viruses	“IMPs, iMUSE and Movers and Shakers were the first to go back face-to-face. Those groups don’t do so much singing, which is thought to be a bigger spreader than non-singing activities, so with these considerations we put in covid regulations (social distancing, testing and mask wearing) and were comfortable with going back face-to-face.”
Adapting to the principles of community music (e.g. inclusivity, participation)	Providing autonomy	Participants are able to choose their own methods of participation	“Some people with disabilities don’t engage with online activities, but as Hands and Voices was very popular online, I think it is important that we keep it as a hybrid model for as long as the participants need it. ”
	Increasing the impact of the event	Engaging more people from outside York	“We have had participants join from areas outside of York and join us each week. If we were not online as well as face-to-face they would not be able to join in with Hands and Voices. ”
	Out of consideration for emergencies	Preventing unforeseen events that would prevent members from attending regularly	“Likewise, if they are feeling under the weather they can still attend the session online. ”
Participants' group characteristics (specificity)	For the sake of health	The participants themselves are more physically vulnerable	“All of our participants have had to be very careful in the pandemic, this could be because they are vulnerable themselves because of their health.”
		Singing is more likely to spread the virus in a pandemic	“ The other groups don’t do so much singing, which is thought to be a bigger spreader than non-singing activities, so with these considerations we put in Covid regulations (social distancing, testing and mask wearing) and were comfortable with going back face-to-face. ”
		Psychological factors of the participant, such as anxiety about leaving home	“If the participants can engage with it, then this provides an activity in their week that they may not get any other time due to reasons such as care support not being available, or some people have such bad anxiety that they can’t leave the house. ”
		Fear of inadequate care measures	“A lot of care providers are struggling with care workers, and if that participant doesn’t have the correct care in place to come to Hands and Voices face-to-face then they can still attend from the safety of their own home. ”

6. Discussion

Analyzing the results of the above online research, expert interviews and literature review, it can be concluded that there are four reasons why AAM only offers a hybrid model in the Hands&Voices project: the hybrid model provides a regular social occasion for participants; Hands&Voices' activities are special in content; the hybrid model provides better access to the principle of inclusivity in community music and enhances participation of members; the uniqueness of the Hands&Voices audience. These reasons are not independent of each other; they influence one another and together contribute to the creation of the hybrid model.

Providing as many regular social occasions as possible for each participant is one of the reasons why the hybrid model was developed. According to the Theory of Change published by AAM, its organisational goals are set out in six points, which are to help participants: learn new skills; explore the world around them in a safe environment; learn to communicate and make friends; develop self-confidence; contribute to the local community; and improve their sense of well-being and become healthier. Krantz (2007)[12] analyses from the perspective of psychology and decision science and concludes that decision makers focus on goals. Therefore, analyzing the reasons why AAM only developed the hybrid model at Hands&Voices in terms of organisational goals is a valid approach. For Hands&Voices, all participants are adults with learning disabilities or handicaps, unlike Inclusive Music Projects where participants have school as a regular social engagement setting. As stated in the comments in Figure 3, this activity provided a regular social setting for everyone. The transcript of the interview with A also mentions that 'an important factor in keeping Hands and Voices as a hybrid model is so that the participants keep their routine'. Leiper (2021) [4] argues that 'high on the positive impact on the health and well-being of online group singing was the need to maintain a routine', which is similar to the findings generated by this study. The hybrid model provides participants with more diverse ways and opportunities to engage in social activities, which is what Hands&Voices' audience groups need most.

In addition, the specificity of Hands&Voices' event content dictates that it is better suited to a hybrid model format. Commenting on why the mixed format was developed. A mentions that Hands&Voices differs from other AAM events in that it is choral-based (which is the same result as the official website shows). This format carries a greater risk of infection in a pandemic. Also due to the large number of members in its group, even after a pandemic, excessive gathering could easily lead to some viral transmission or injury, therefore it is a good option to divert people through online events.

A hybrid model was developed for Hands&Voices because it was a way to realise the principles of community music inclusion and increase participation in the event. It is inclusive of those who can and cannot be present. Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that 'Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community.' [13] Offering online participation is a fantastic approach to respect everyone's right to participate and to achieve inclusivity for those who cannot be present physically but yet want to engage. Compared to the youth audience of IMPS and the sophisticated apparatus employed by IMUS, Hands&Voices is the most suitable project to implement the principle of inclusion. Additionally, all participants in the AAM's research on online initiatives felt they had a voice in the meetings. This reflects the fact that the online route is able to achieve participant engagement in the event.

The group characteristics and specificity of the participants also contributed to the development of the hybrid model. Hands&Voices participants are vulnerable themselves due to health reasons and require certain care measures. These are difficult to take adequate care of in offline activities. Therefore, participation in online activities is the best option for those who are in poorer health but

still wish to take part and maintain their friendships.

7. Conclusions

Based on a summary of AAM's experience of events from the pandemic outbreak to the present day, this study uses online research data, interview data and literature findings to explain why, of the many events, AAM has developed a hybrid model only for Hands&Voices. The conclusions drawn are that: the hybrid model can provide a regular social occasion for participants; the content of Hands&Voices events is specific; the hybrid model can better realise the principle of inclusivity in community music and increase participation of members; and because of the uniqueness of the Hands&Voices audience. The next step for this study could be to construct an operational approach to the hybrid model based on the findings of the study, and to investigate other examples of hybrid models to deduce which groups of choirs for which the model is appropriate. Finally, this study has some shortcomings in terms of data collection. The lack of collection of quantitative data limits the accuracy and universality of the findings.

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