

Experiences with Summer Camp Communication via Discord

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2023 Camp Overview

- 3 weeks long, 2 hour camp days
- Fully online - Zoom and Discord
 - Used breakout rooms to teach in small groups
- Used Scratch to teach basic programming and game design
- Encouraged communication and teamwork outside of camp hours through Discord

TABLE 1 **Camp Activities: A Chronological Overview**

Day 1	Welcome session
	Meet instructors and campers
	Install and check required software
Day 2	Technology check for campers
	Introduction to game story types
	Group brainstorm: Game types
	Building first example game
Day 3	First example game continued
Day 4	Building second example game
Day 5	Creating music and sound effects
	Group brainstorm: Game ideas
Day 6	Meet assigned teammates
	Team brainstorm: Game aspects
Day 7-12	Team: Game development
Day 13	Team: Game development
	Team: Practice final presentation
Day 14	Team: Final touches on game
	Team: Practice final presentation
Day 15	Team: Presentation of final games to guardians and guests

Camp Attendees

Instructors

- 13 total instructors
 - 8 have helped with a previous camp
- 3 university professors
- 5 Ph.D. students
- 3 undergraduate students
- 2 working professionals

Campers

- 27 total campers
 - On average 20 attended each day
 - 5 only attended the first week
- 14 - 17 years old
- Most had programming experience
 - 11 had no previous experience

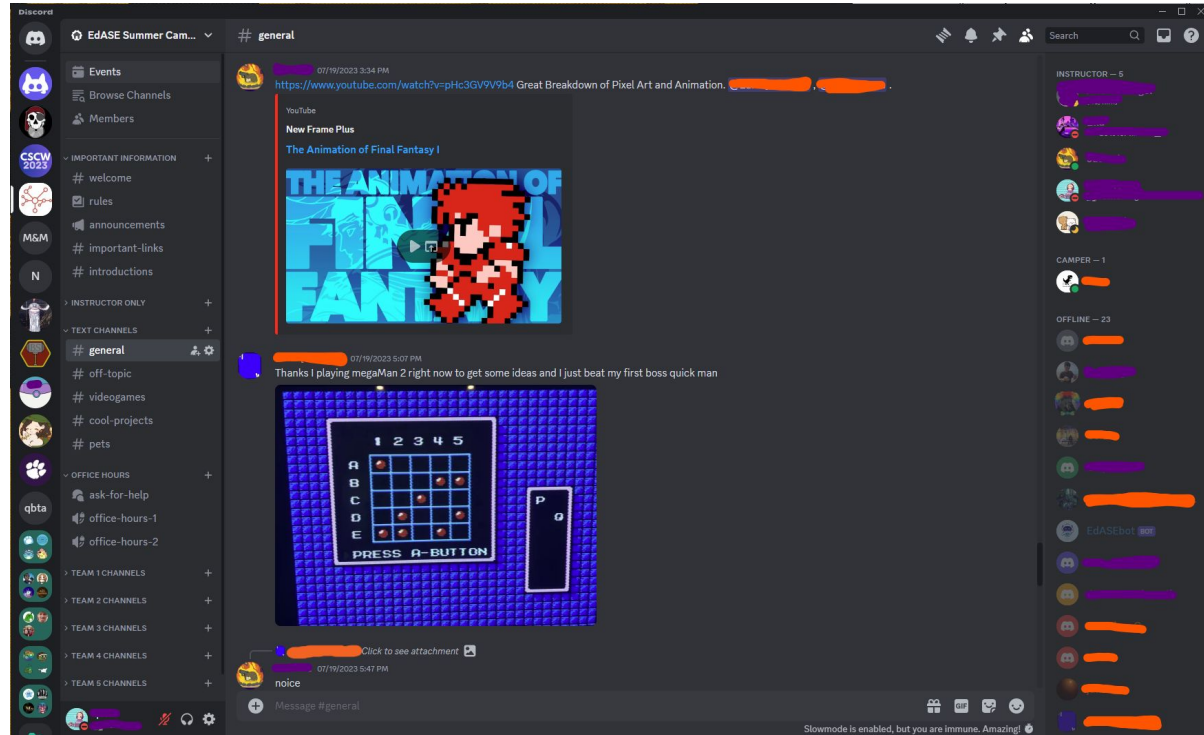
What is Discord?

- **Discord was created in 2015 for gamers to talk to one another**
 - Successor of other VoIP software such as Skype, TeamSpeak, and Ventrilo
- **Discord has features similar to Slack or MS Teams**
 - Voice, Video, and Text chat
- **Discord is organized into servers**
 - Each server hosts a collection of channels
- **Popularity rose with the COVID-19 pandemic**
 - People transitioned their communities to an online space
 - Including libraries and universities



Camp Discord server

- Communication outside of camp hours
- MS Teams VS Discord
- Our server had both text and voice chatting channels



Discord's Impact on Camp

**10 out of 13 instructors interviewed
about their experiences and thoughts on
using Discord during camp**

Camper Observations

- Campers were familiar with Discord from the start
- Few Discord conversations happened outside of camp hours
- Our most-used channel was #general with 649 different messages sent
- The Team channels were not used for brainstorming, instead they became a way to share files

“I feel like the campers were a lot more used to Discord than some of us instructors. It felt more natural to them.”

Discord Moderation

- **Discord moderation fell to the instructors**
 - Many expressed this was their first time in a moderation role

“I’ve never been a moderator before.”

- **Running camp on Zoom and moderating the Discord server was difficult in the beginning**
 - We turned to Discord’s AutoMod and SlowMode features to help moderate messages

“[The campers] seemed to use Discord the same way they used the Zoom chat, which is like just spewing things constantly.”

Discord VS. Other Tools

- MS Teams was used for instructor communication in our past camps
 - Swapped to Discord this year

“Yeah, I prefer Discord because I think Teams is a little too rigid when we involve people from outside [of our academic institution].”

- We have not provided a way for campers to communicate before
 - Which is why we chose to try Discord this year

“I think it was the right tool with the right audience. Many of the students at least knew Discord.”

Instructor's Favorite and Least Favorite Features

Favorite Features

- Mentioning (@-ing) others quickly
- Reactions to make sure others had read our messages
- Administrative tools
- Multiple channels for different topics

Least Favorite Features

- Finding conversations could be difficult if the chat is moving
- Separating personal accounts from professional settings

Lessons Learned: Designing a Discord Server

- Group similar channels together and use Discord roles to lock specific channels.
- Incorporate an instructor training session to determine channel topics.
- Use Discord's slowmode feature to reduce message spamming and to help keep campers on-task during camp hours.
- Incorporate interactive Discord sessions for the campers into the curriculum.

Lessons Learned: Moderation Features

- **Enable slowmode and custom word blocking for high-traffic channels.**
- **Know what moderation features are available and create a moderation plan with your team to handle any emergency situations.**

Thank you!

