SAFE SPACE AND SHARED INTERESTS

YOUmedia Chicago as a Laboratory for Connected Learning

The Digital Media + Learning Research Hub
Report Series on Connected Learning

Written by:
Kiley Larson
Mizuko Ito
Eric Brown
Mike Hawkins
Nichole Pinkard
Penny Sebring

With contributions from:
JoVia Armstrong
Taylor Bayless
Dominique James
Miona Short

Digital Media + Learning Research Hub

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INTRODUCTION

In today's digital and networked media ecology, young people have a wealth of new learning opportunities that span home, school, community, and peer culture. In addition to being able to access well-established learning resources in the form of school-based classes, museums, and libraries, young people can turn to online resources and communities to pursue self-directed learning tailored to their own unique interests and at their own pace. They can also use accessible digital media authoring tools to create music, video, artwork, and writing; share; and get feedback and mentorship in communities of interest. Through these capabilities, we see digital and networked media as offering the potential for broadened access to connected learning–learning that is socially connected, interest-driven, and oriented toward educational, economic, and political opportunity (Ito et al. 2013). Despite the tremendous opportunities for connected learning afforded by today's digital, interactive, and networked media, research has also consistently demonstrated that only a small minority of young people fully take advantage of these opportunities. We see a real risk that digital media will result in a greater equity gap as public school systems struggle to support the diverse range of learner-centered and interest-driven inquiry in which today's most activated, wired, and privileged learners are engaged.

This report documents an ongoing design experiment that addresses issues of digital literacy, connected learning, and equity through the design, establishment, and ongoing development of a youth media center, the YOUmedia learning lab at the Chicago Public Library's downtown Harold Washington Library Center. Supported by the MacArthur Foundation's Digital Media and Learning (DML) Initiative, YOUmedia represents a collaboration between the Chicago Public Library (CPL) and Digital Youth Network (DYN), a digital media literacy and mentoring program. Located on the first floor of Chicago's flagship public library, YOUmedia is dedicated to the interests of teens and supported by librarians and mentors with expertise in digital media production.

Opened in the fall of 2009, YOUmedia occupies 5,500 square feet on the ground floor of the Harold Washington Library Center. From the beginning, YOUmedia was designed to support three forms of digital media participation identified by Ito et al. (2009)–hanging out, messing around, and geeking out. The design team sought to create a physical space that would promote these distinct forms of participation and, in doing so, foster youth engagement and learning. In addition to welcoming young people to engage in casual social "hanging out" with friends, YOUmedia offers workshops and mentoring in interest areas that help youth further develop knowledge and expertise, or "geek out." The space also allows and encourages youth to engage in informal "messing around" with the resources provided. The overarching purpose in designing YOUmedia was to create a space that supported digital and traditional literacy development and was welcoming of, engaging to, and easily accessible by teens. There is also an online social network site associated with YOUmedia on the iRemix platform, where young people can share their work and communicate with peers and mentors 24 hours a day.

YOUmedia provides teens access to a diverse array of resources that go beyond structured educational offerings. Young people can check out video cameras, laptops, books, and art supplies for their own use. They can also access music recording equipment, music editing software, and graphic design software, which can be prohibitively expensive to purchase for home use. In addition to these tangible resources, YOUmedia connects teens to the wealth of knowledge possessed by the DYN mentors and library staff. The meaningful relationships teens at YOUmedia are able to form with adults who share their interests are one of the driving forces behind the success of the space. While providing social and interest-based support to teens, DYN mentors and library staff also help teens to draw connections between their activities at YOUmedia and academic achievement or career opportunity. The mentorship model currently in place at YOUmedia was originally developed and supported by DYN but has evolved over time to meet the needs of teens in the space. As YOUmedia matured, library staff members also increasingly took the role of mentor. In fact, teens at YOUmedia refer to all adults in the space as mentors; they do not see distinctions between adults staffed by the library and those staffed by DYN. Library staff members were incorporated into DYN professional development to facilitate their growth as mentors and to help build a coherent approach to working with youth in the space across the two organizations.

YOUmedia continues to develop and evolve based on the interests and initiative of the youth, mentors, and librarians who frequent the space. The creation of a safe and welcoming space for youth interaction and the provision of resources with adult support provide an important foundation for encouraging youth to engage with their peers around their various interests. These features of YOUmedia are provided in the context of a "hybrid" design that allows for a high degree of youth choice, including "elements of a free-form public space and a typical out-of-school program that provides teens with structured activities organized by adults" (Sebring et al. 2013).

The YOUmedia effort has garnered the attention of educators, youth, and media around the country, and even internationally, for providing a living laboratory to reimagine the public library as a space that is welcoming and engaging to teens, and for leveraging the opportunities that digital media have to offer for learning. Other libraries, museums, and community and cultural institutions are beginning to develop digital media centers that are informed by the YOUmedia model, and the MacArthur Foundation has teamed up with the Institute for Museum and Library Services and the Association of Science – Technology Centers to support the design of YOUmedia-inspired Learning Labs in other parts of the country.[1]

1 This growing effort and community are gathered at http://www.YOUmedia.org.

In tandem with the development and evolution of the YOUmedia model, researchers have been examining the learning outcomes of participation in YOUmedia and how the program is tied to changes at a collective and institutional level. Research by the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR) has documented the implementation of YOUmedia from its inception, how the collaborative development has

evolved, and outcomes at the youth and institutional levels (Austin et al. 2011; Sebring et al. 2013). This report builds on this research and additional research conducted by Larson as part of New York University's Connecting Youth: Digital Learning Research Project (CY), which examines a range of Learning Labs in informal educational institutions, including YOUmedia Chicago. In parallel with the program's innovative work and the empirical research at YOUmedia Chicago, the Connected Learning Research Network has been developing a conceptual and design model inspired in part by the YOUmedia effort. YOUmedia Chicago represents a focus of attention for on-the-ground program development, research on learning outcomes, and the development of the conceptual and design model for connected learning. This report integrates these three dimensions of research and development, identifying key principles and design features through focused reflection on the first three years of YOUmedia's operation. This report is not an evaluation of the degree to which YOUmedia has delivered on these learning outcomes or design aspirations, but rather is an effort to reflect on and clarify the design model and learning goals as they relate to connected learning.

This report first frames the social and educational issues that YOUmedia addresses, and describes the design model in relation to connected learning. It then explores a set of learning outcomes to which the model aspires at both a collective and individual level, providing examples based on youth accounts. Three examples of youth who were highly engaged at YOUmedia and the opportunities the space opened up to them are also included, as well as an appendix—the Connected Learning Program Guide from YOUmedia Chicago—authored by Sam Dyson and YOUmedia mentors and librarians. The program guide describes "signature projects" that have successfully engaged mentors and youth in joint, purposeful activities.

THE SOCIAL ISSUES THAT YOUMEDIA ADDRESSES

Young people coming of age in the U.S. today are facing a period of economic contraction, uncertainty, and rapid change. Low-income and minority youth suffer the brunt of the negative impacts of these economic changes as it has become harder and harder to access pathways to educational and economic opportunity (Elder, Kapsos, and Sparreboom 2010; Mishel, Bernstein, and Shierholz 2009). Even as we see our public education system flounder in delivering equitable opportunity (Duncan and Murnane 2011), we are seeing a proliferation of rich, accessible, and low-cost tools for learning in the form of online educational content, learning games, and networked communities of interest and expertise. The problem is that children and youth who lack social, economic, and cultural capital are not reaping the benefits of the rich learning opportunities that today's digital and networked media offer (Ito et al. 2009; Livingstone 2009; Seiter 2005; Watkins 2009). It is imperative that we work to reconsider and remake our educational and cultural institutions in ways that are responsive to these changing economic and demographic trends, as well as the opportunities afforded by online networks and educational content.

Young people who come from families who already have robust social supports for learning are accessing fast-paced knowledge networks and their abundant opportunities for self-actualizing learning. Connected learning for these young people is grounded in local community resources, parents who provide out-of-school enrichment opportunities, and schools with a wide range of offerings in both the core curriculum and in arts, athletics, and advanced academic topics. The ability to access rich knowledge resources and communities of interest online enhances these existing forms of social, cultural, and economic capital. These young people are guided to educationally valuable games early in life; are provided tools for producing music, art, and creative writing when they have the desire for self-expression; and have parents, mentors, and peers who introduce them to a wide range of creative and intellectual interests as they grow older. Online social networks become a way of reinforcing interest-driven identities that are supported across multiple contexts of home, school, and community, as young people plug into discussion forums, wikis, how-to videos, and online communities in a drive toward knowledge and expertise.

When young people lack local social networks and institutional support for the learning they care about, they rarely take full advantage of the learning opportunities afforded by today's online information or social and interactive media. Research has demonstrated that it is only exceptionally motivated and resourceful young people who are able to pursue self-directed and interest-driven learning without the support of adult mentors and learning institutions (Ito et al. 2009, 2013). Many young people are growing up in poor communities devastated by unemployment and failing schools. Even schools serving middle-class youth are facing cutbacks in their ability to provide more than the standards-driven curriculum. When adults and community institutions in a young person's life fail to serve genuine interests, new media provides means to disengage from academics, civic life, and meaningful career trajectories. Young people

2 The term "non-dominant" is used here instead of more common terms such as "minority," "diverse," or "of color," as non-dominant explicitly calls attention to issues of power and power relations more so than do these more traditional terms to describe members of differing cultural groups (Gutiérrez, Morales, and Martinez 2009).

turn to peer communication and popular culture as a way of coping with alienation and finding meaningful relationships and cultural content with which to identify. New media is a double-edged sword because it amplifies existing social and cultural capital and place the onus of learning on individual choices and responsibility. Given the opportunities available to a young person, which reflect familiar forms of inequity, it is either the best or the worst of times for learners.

Young people learn best and are most motivated when they have strong social supports for their learning in the form of caring adults with shared interests, peers who value knowledge and expertise, and institutions and communities that provide safe spaces and high standards. In other words, it is not enough to simply point to the rich opportunities for learning and social connection that young people can access through online networks; we must design and support social and institutional environments that provide resources, relationships, and community standards that guide young people to these learning opportunities. Today's economic and social climate for learning and equity, as well as the evidence behind connected learning, is documented in more detail in the report *Connected Learning: An Agenda for Research and Design* (Ito et al. 2013).

YOUMEDIA'S APPROACH TO LEARNING, DESIGN, AND INFLUENCE

Together with the Quest to Learn Schools and the Hive Learning Networks, the YOUmedia Learning Labs represent key DML test beds for the connected learning approach to design and educational reform. Connected learning is learning that is socially connected, interest-driven, and oriented toward educational, economic, or political opportunity. It is realized when a young person is able to pursue a personal interest or passion with the support of friends and caring adults and, in turn, is able to link this learning and interest to academic achievement, career success, or civic engagement (Ito et al. 2013). This model is based on evidence that the most resilient, adaptive, and effective learning involves individual interest, as well as social supports and recognition. Connected learning requires bringing together three spheres of learning that often are either disconnected or at war with each other in young people's lives: peer culture, interests, and academic content. Connected learners are those who are able to create links among their own interests, their peer supports, and their adult-facing achievement, but they are a distinct minority. Both the connected learning approach and YOUmedia are oriented toward filling in the gaps and building these linkages in the learning ecosystems of diverse youth so that they can make these connections. Through the design of physical and online space, mentorship programs, curricula, and shared projects and performances, YOUmedia seeks to create environments that support the development of twenty-first century literacies and draw non-dominant youth into connected learning experiences. The continuing evolution of YOUmedia Chicago, as well as the growing network of YOUmedia Learning Labs, represents an iterative feedback loop between research, design, and practice for the development and refinement of the connected learning model.

YOUmedia Chicago's design drew from the findings of the Digital Youth Project, a multi-year ethnographic study investigating young people's learning with new media. This project found that the majority of youth primarily engage with video games and digital and online media in a mode of "hanging out" with peers. Based on their immersion in digital media, some kids "mess around" by tinkering with, modifying, sharing, and curating technology and media. Only a small minority take to new media environments to "geek out," diving deeply into communities of interest and expertise that fuel connected learning. Geeked-out kids often are highly motivated and resourceful learners and, more often than not, have abundant local resources and relationships that support self-directed learning. The majority of young people–those who are mostly just hanging out online and occasionally messing around–lack strong connections between their peer-, interest-, and adult-centered worlds. It is typical for adults to see social and recreational activity with new media as a waste of time, and they often don't support new technology use that is not explicitly academic in nature. Young people's peers, who are largely of their same age group at school, are not particularly oriented toward intellectual or creative pursuits. If they are lucky, youth may have some friends who share passionate interests (Ito et al. 2009).

YOUmedia Chicago explicitly was designed to mediate between these different genres of new media engagement. The designers created hanging out spaces for more casual social activity, where teens can bring food, play video games, and relax on comfortable sofas. This hanging out space is adjacent to the messing around space, with easy access to computers, a sound studio, and other digital media production resources. At the far end of the room is a space for more structured workshops, where mentors lead classes, and there is a large table and whiteboard. While these different spaces are defined in these ways, they remain part of one large undivided space to facilitate visibility and flow between these types of activities.
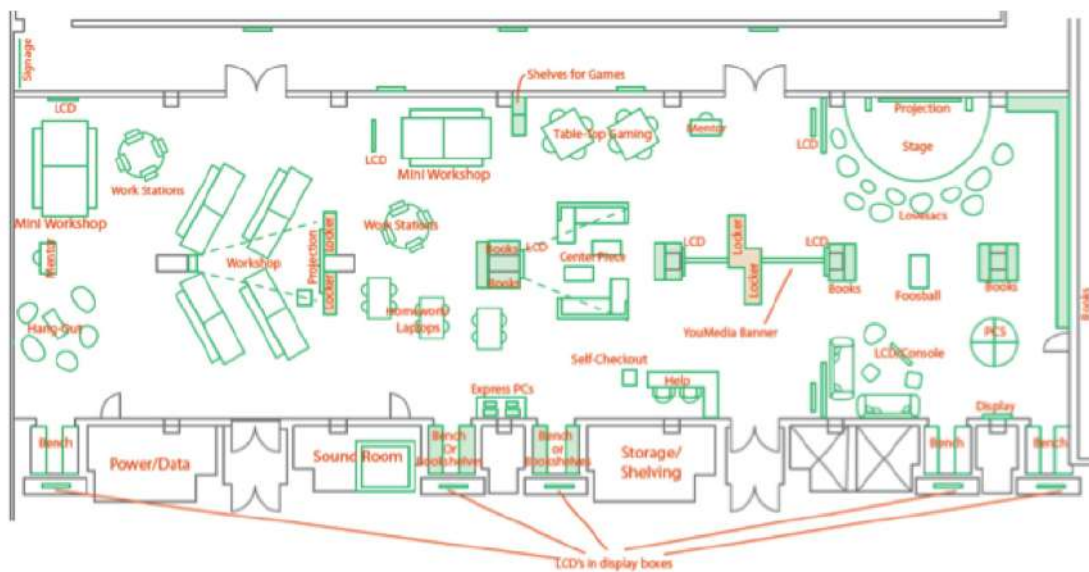
In the first years of operation, YOUmedia's programming structure was based on the model employed by DYN in various other in- and after-school youth educational spaces. The DYN mentors placed at YOUmedia had vast experience working within the DYN programming model and were carefully selected to ensure the uptake of several existing DYN programming structures at YOUmedia. However, the DYN model had been nurtured and developed in spaces with a dedicated youth population and allowed for more structured educational offerings. Adapting the DYN model to YOUmedia, a drop-in space with a fluctuating youth population, presented several challenges. The primary tension arose from attempting to combine structured program offerings designed to last several weeks–where each week builds on skills learned in previous weeks–with the culture of the library, where teens were not required to attend and could drop in and out of programming at will. This productive tension led to numerous iterations of DYN's instructional goals in order to better align its programming model with the "hanging out, messing around, and geeking out" principles that underpinned the design of YOUmedia. To this end, YOUmedia mentors and staff have continuously adapted their programs and ways of engaging with youth.

This adaptation includes professional development keyed to mentorship at YOUmedia; constant redesign of the workshops and offerings; and the development of new kinds of programs, such as internships and "signature projects," which bring mentors and teens together into collaborative productions and performances. As researchers have engaged with YOUmedia and these innovations, they have fed back into the development of the research agenda and a design framework that creates stronger links between research and practice (Sebring et al. 2013). The Connected Learning Research Network was constituted in 2011, just over a year after YOUmedia's inception. A set of principles of connected learning was released in March 2012–in large part inspired by the YOUmedia model–and these principles continue to be fleshed out and refined through ongoing research at YOUmedia and other sites, most recently in the report *Connected Learning: An Agenda for Research and Design* (Ito et al. 2013).

A few unique elements of YOUmedia's approach toward change and influence are worthy of note. First, YOUmedia is centered on the interests and identities of non-dominant youth. In recent years, with the turn to digital and mobile forms of popular culture, we have seen a closing of the "digital divide," as black and Latino youth have flocked to games and social and mobile media (Lenhart 2009; Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts 2010). Digital media content and popular culture thus represent prime opportunities to engage non-dominant youth who might be alienated from other adult institutions that are academic or career-relevant. Meeting youth where they are in their authentic engagements does not mean "sugar coating" academic content in the idioms of popular culture or "tricking" kids into intellectual engagements through a veneer of "cool" culture, but rather the reverse; it is about appreciating and building from the deep knowledge and capacity that young people are developing in their social and out-of-school lives.

In addition to its grounding in non-dominant youth's interests and identities, YOUmedia recognizes that learning is irreducibly social; it is through relationships with peers and caring adults that young people are exposed to and develop interests and expertise. Put differently, the target is not to have kids geeking out in isolation, but rather to create a social environment that values the whole person, including hanging out and belonging to a community, as well as the play and exploration of messing around. In order to develop their learning potential, young people need a safe social environment where they can explore, experiment with, and engage in new interests while deepening existing ones. And they need an environment where they can make a genuine contribution to a community through shared activities.

By focusing on these relational and informal dimensions of learning, YOUmedia follows in the footsteps of efforts such as the 5th Dimension after school clubs (Cole 1997) and Intel Computer Clubhouse Network (Rusk, Resnick, and Cook 2009), which support interest discovery and development within a social setting. Rather than focus on the delivery of content or program replication, these efforts have centered on building

environments for youth and adult participants to co-construct activities and programs. This strategy reflects a learning approach "characterized by a demand-pull rather than the traditional supply-push mode of building up an inventory of knowledge in students' heads" (Brown and Adler 2008). This approach necessitates innovation and adaptation based on the culture and identity of the young people whom the program serves–working from there to build a network of social supports and connections to schools, career opportunity, and civic engagement. This stance toward bottom-up rather than top-down programming is core to the connected learning model. As diverse institutions and communities adopt elements of the connected learning and YOUmedia approach, we expect not only remix and remaking, but also substantively new innovations that will drive a networked community of education reform. New YOUmedia Learning Labs have looked to YOUmedia Chicago for ideas and inspiration but have created unique kinds of environments and programming that reflect the interests of their participants. Scaling will only happen through these forms of active adoption and local innovation rather than a centralized supply-driven model.

The approach toward technology and design grows out of this orientation toward innovation and scaling. Unlike technology-centric efforts that take a "build it and they will come" approach, YOUmedia looks at designed technologies and programs in a broader social and cultural ecology. YOUmedia is one node in a young person's ecology of learning, which includes school, family, peers, and community contexts. Building social and cultural capital takes time and a network of social and institutional resources that extend well beyond YOUmedia's walls.

JAMES: FINDING A PLACE FOR HIMSELF

Seventeen-year-old James, a sophomore at a local charter school, lives with his mother in an affluent neighborhood in North Chicago. His parents are divorced, and he's not sure what either of them do for a living, but he does know they went to college. He has a vast array of technology at home, including his own desktop computer, an Xbox 360 with Kinect, a PS3, a Wii, and a 30-inch flat screen TV, all of which reside in his bedroom. Both of his parents push him to do well academically, but James doesn't really like school. In fact, while he earns mostly B's (with a few A's), he is often uninspired during class. He says, "I'm not against school. I don't want to be like, 'Oh, screw school. I'll be okay with just sitting down, getting mediocre grades' or something. It's just I want to get to a school where I'm actually learning things that I'm interested in."

In contrast to his lack of enthusiasm about school, James is highly engaged at YOUmedia and has become a spokesperson for the program, a role that he seems to relish. He says:

> I love telling the story of how I got here. I mean I've realized that a lot of the things that I say have apparently been used in a lot of audio snippets. "Just be like this kid who used YOUmedia to help out with school. This kid came to YOUmedia first just wanting to play video games and then became more immersed in the technology." That actually does sound like they've completed their mission here.

> I mean YOUmedia is probably the greatest place on earth, next to my house, but that's a given. I think they're just a combination with just an awesome selection of video games and laptops already available at any time you want, combined with the awesome people that this place seems to attract and the coolest adults I've ever met in my life working here. I'd say that this place is a generally favorable area to be in.

Before he began going to YOUmedia, which is only a few blocks from his school, he worried a lot about what he would do for a career. James, unlike many of his friends, didn't want to be a doctor, lawyer, or account executive. He only wanted to play or talk about video games, but he didn't see how that could become a viable career.

James has always been highly involved in gaming–not only playing games, but also discussing and dissecting the ins and outs of game design and storyline. In middle school, he used to listen to videogame podcasts a lot, but at the time he didn't think he could start one of his own. He describes how he "really had no idea what I was going to be doing. I actually thought that I was going to be a failure in life. I didn't think that I was going to be able to get anywhere." This began to change after he discovered YOUmedia.

At YOUmedia, he was able to hang out with a group of peers who shared a gaming interest. Initially, YOUmedia was a place to be able to spend more time and build stronger relationships with gaming friends from school, as well as other gamers at YOUmedia. Skylar, one of the librarians who is a gamer herself, saw an opportunity to leverage the interest that these teens had in gaming to engage them in media production. She invited them to begin creating a gaming podcast and website where James and his friends could review games, offer tips for beating levels, and provide industry level analysis (see Program Guide: Library of Games).

Skylar increasingly began to take on the role of life mentor for James, building on their shared affinity for games. He describes what for him was a pivotal conversation he had with Skylar, where he asked her how she got "the coolest job on the planet" as a teen librarian. "She gets to sit down there. She gets to talk with teens who are actually cool and know what they're talking about and stuff. She's into video games, and she gets to express that through the things that she does here." Skylar shared her story–how after graduating from college she tried different things and different jobs

and she didn't know her pathway in advance. Hearing about how she arrived at where she was through a process of exploration and discovery was a revelation for James. "I'm just like, 'Wow, God, I might actually be able to do something.'"

After that, he began exploring other avenues for creative expression and skill development at YOUmedia. He began editing videos and experimenting with special effects. "I've liked art for a long time, but I never knew what I was going to do with that, and then I started creating these videos, and I started messing around with designs and stuff." These explorations began to expand his imagination of what he might do for a future career. He had already come to the conclusion that playing video games as a career was "just not a thing." He had not been able to imagine a way of connecting his interests in media and technology to a more realistic career option, and he found the traditional professional tracks to be unappealing. YOUmedia gave him the space, relationship, and tools to translate a diffuse interest into productive activity that helped him explore different avenues for producing, working, and contributing. "I'm like, 'Man, this could make a really nice menu or just really nice videos in general. I could get into designing stuff for people in the future.' . . . I started having a lot of fun with this. 'Man, this is really fun. Wait, people get paid to do this sort of stuff.'

. . . Apparently, designers and stuff get lots of money. I'm okay with that. I'll do that."

His mother, who was initially resistant to James spending so much time at YOUmedia, has come to see the benefit of his participation. He says, "She used to not like it so much because the more I came here, the less homework I started doing." When he was spending so much time just hanging out with gamer friends and playing, she saw it as a distraction from his learning and development. After he started engaging in more production-oriented activities and developing more digital media skills, she came to support his participation at the site and appreciate the opportunities it has opened up for him. Regardless of whether James does ultimately go on to become a designer or a special effects editor, YOUmedia has motivated him to explore and pursue a set of possibilities that connects his interests and supportive peer relationships with a positive orientation to his future learning and career. James' story illustrates the role that many key design dimensions of connected learning and the YOUmedia model play in integrating interests, peer relations, and opportunity. These include the key role of mentors and peer supports; shared purpose in the form of a signature project; and the important role that a production activity, published in the openly networked format of a podcast and website, played in garnering both engagement and recognition.

Connected learning represents a living, working model for describing and promoting learning that is relevant, socially engaged, and connected to both interests and opportunity. The model grows out of ongoing empirical research, as well as iterative design research in contexts such as YOUmedia. In this section of the report, we describe the core features and design principles of connected learning and how the approach relates to the features and design of YOUmedia Chicago. For the sake of brevity, in the following sections, adults at YOUmedia, both mentors and library staff, will collectively be referred to as YOUmedia staff.[3]

Integrating Three Spheres of Learning
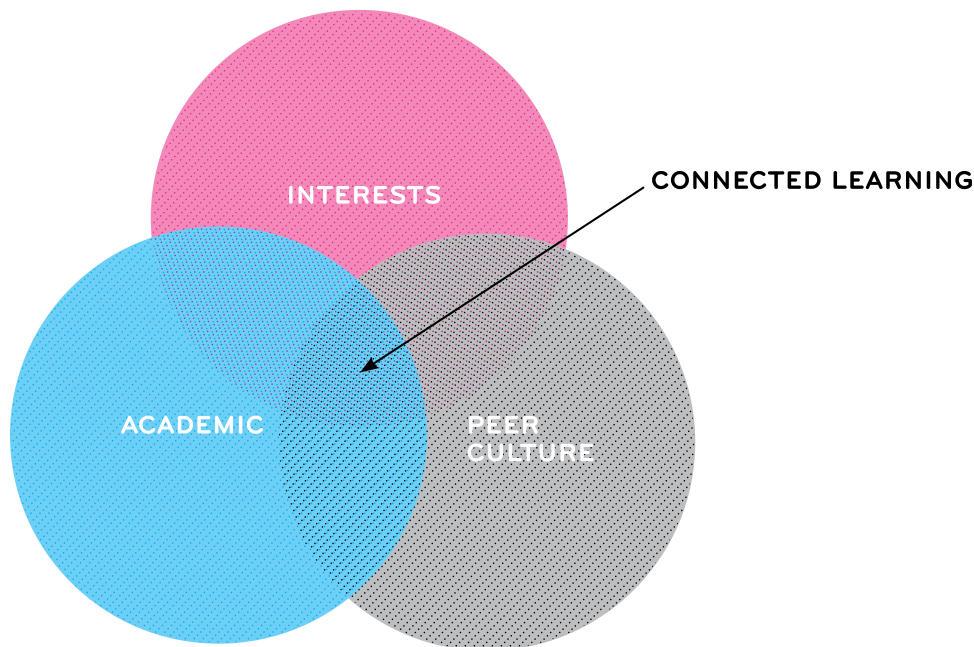
Connected learning is defined by the space of integration between three spheres of learning that are commonly disconnected in young people's lives: interests, peer culture, and the academic sphere, which can also include career and civic opportunities. In considering the ways in which YOUmedia Chicago instantiates the principles of connected learning, it is important to emphasize that not all activities in any given environment like YOUmedia are focused on the space of integration. While connected learning is defined by the integration of the peer, interest, and academic spheres, these varied activities need their own space of separation and autonomy. Libraries, in particular, place a high value on self-directed interests and choice, which do not have to be tied to academics or future opportunity. YOUmedia Chicago was also designed to allow for peer social activity, or hanging out, that does not have to be interest-driven or academic in orientation. This hybrid design means that DYN mentors, who are focused on connecting interests to skills and academics, often experience productive tension with the values of the library, which center on choice and self-directed learning (Sebring et al.

3 Some portions of this section of the report are reproduced from the Connected Learning Report (Ito et al. 2013).

2013). This kind of hybridity and productive tension is characteristic of environments that support connected learning, as they bring together diverse motivations, values, and priorities. In this report, we focus on these hybrid zones of integration, while also recognizing that YOUmedia supports a range of activities that may not fully be oriented toward this integration and the connected learning approach. For a more complete characterization of the environment as a whole, and resulting youth outcomes, readers should refer to the CCSR research reports (Austin et al. 2011; Sebring et al. 2013).

Interest Powered

Interests power the drive to acquire knowledge and expertise. Research shows that people who are interested in what they are learning achieve higher-order learning outcomes. Connected learning does not just rely on the innate interests of the individual learner, but views interests and passions as something to be actively developed in the context of personalized learning pathways that allow for specialized and diverse identities and interests. At YOUmedia, teens are exposed to potential areas of interest by interacting with their peers, watching others engage in interest-related activities, or participating in workshops and other programs run by mentors.

YOUmedia programs and mentorship are grounded in specific media specialties taught by DYN and in the interests and expertise of the library staff. These programs include music, spoken word, electronic gaming, writing, and design. Some of these specialties were chosen to appeal directly to non-dominant youth interests and identities. DYN mentors are chosen for their expertise as artists in these interest areas and for their ability to connect with youth. While the library staff are not hired based on their expertise as artists, they are chosen based on their ability to build relationships with teens, and they actively have looked for ways to incorporate their own interests into YOUmedia programming. In other words, both mentors and library staff embody the culture and identity of the core interests supported in the space. Together, the YOUmedia staff have adapted old and created new programming to respond to the interests that young people bring to the space. For example, after noticing a group of young gamers' interest in reviewing games, a librarian developed and implemented a game review podcast.

Peer Supported

Learning in the context of peer interaction is engaging and participatory. Research shows that among friends and peers, young people fluidly contribute, share, and give feedback to one another, producing powerful learning. Connected learning research demonstrates that learning need not be peer-isolated. In the context of interest-driven activity, young people also welcome adult participation. At YOUmedia, the presence of caring adults in the space provide youth with additional learning supports and insulate them from the more negative aspects of peer relationships. Although expertise and roles in peer learning can differ based on age and experience, everyone gives feedback to one another and can contribute and share their knowledge and views.

While the structured activities at YOUmedia are centered on geeking out around media production interests, the majority of the space is designed to invite unstructured social-izing–in other words, hanging out and messing around. On any given afternoon, dozens of young people are sitting on the comfortable sofas, socializing with their friends, eat-ing, and casually playing games with one another. Here, teens are welcome and able to bring their peer activity and diverse interests into the space. iRemix is similarly a safe space for young people to communicate with one another and adult mentors.

Academically Oriented

Educational institutions are centered on the principle that intellectual growth thrives when learning is directed toward academic achievement and excellence. Connected learning recognizes the importance of academic success for intellectual growth and as an avenue to economic and political opportunity. Peer culture and interest-driven activ-ity need to be connected to academic subjects, institutions, and credentials for diverse young people to realize these opportunities. Connected learning mines and translates popular peer culture and community-based knowledge for academic relevance.

YOUmedia staff are passionate about their areas of expertise and interest and make ef-forts to expose YOUmedia participants to the broader world of activity associated with their interest areas. In order to forge these broader connections, mentors and librarians bring others from their field into the YOUmedia site to give performances and presen-tations. Staff support young people in shared projects and competitions that connect them to peers and experts outside of the space. For example, YOUmedia participants have written for The Huffington Post and have worked on design for Lady Gaga's Born This Way Foundation tour bus. While many young people pursue interests in areas such as hip hop and video games, only a small minority are able to connect these inter-ests to achievement and opportunity outside of the space of YOUmedia.

Core Properties of Connected Learning Environments

Connected learning builds on what we've long known about the value and effectiveness of interest-driven, peer-supported, and academically relevant learning. In addition, con-nected learning calls on today's interactive and networked media in an effort to make these forms of learning more effective, better integrated, and broadly accessible. At the core of connected learning environments, we generally observe the following character-istics: (1) shared purpose, (2) production and performance, and (3) open networks.

Shared Purpose

In contrast to most classroom learning, everyday learning outside of school generally happens as a part of engaging in an activity or goal that is not explicitly educational, whether that is getting food on the table, playing a game, preparing a presentation, or communicating with friends and family. When learning is part of purposeful activity

and inquiry, embedded in meaningful social relationships and practices, it is engaging and resilient. Learning and cognition "in the wild" also tend to happen in social and collaborative contexts where individuals work together, share knowledge, and engage in joint inquiry (Hutchins 1995). Unlike in classrooms, there is little need to assess and mark individual knowledge and expertise; it is more important that collective goals are accomplished.

Connected learning environments draw together young people and adults in joint activities that are defined by shared purpose, goals, or collaborative production (Miell and Littleton 2004). These common interests and goals become a way of cementing cross-generational connections and propelling meaningful learning and inquiry. This activity might be in the context of civic and political engagement, media or performance production, fan engagement, or tournament competition. Formal instruction, workshops, and training may happen in individual contexts and moments disconnected from these joint activities, but the shared purpose creates the collective frame and defines ways of collaborating and competing. Ways of supporting shared purpose include:

Projects with collective goals: Connected learning environments have periodic or ongoing projects that mobilize the community and bring participants together in a shared effort. These are moments when the ongoing learning in which participants engage becomes useful and relevant for a collective enterprise, as well as moments where people are motivated to pursue more knowledge, expertise, and inquiry to further the effort.

Collaborations and competitions: Shared engagement can include both collaborative and competitive activity, as appropriate to the interest area. Gaming and sports are generally motivated by competitive tournaments and games, as well as real-time collaboration in the form of teamwork. Creative production generally has a more collaborative dimension to it, though contests and competitions can also provide shared purpose.

Cross-generational leadership and ownership: Both young people and adults have opportunities to take leadership roles and contribute in diverse ways to the shared endeavor. All participants should have a stake in and have influence over the project, regardless of age and expertise. Norms and expectations are collectively maintained.

At YOUmedia, all of the interest areas are mobilized periodically in "signature projects" that bring mentors and the most active teens together to create shared productions (see Appendix). These productions include ongoing projects, such as the video game podcast and blog series Library of Games and the weekly Lyricist Loft open mic sessions. In addition, YOUmedia produces a literary magazine and record label where teen music artists and graphic designers collaboratively publish their work. Mentors also support participation in competitions and projects sponsored in the city, such as Chicago's biannual

One Book, One Chicago program and slam poetry competitions such as Louder Than a Bomb. YOUmedia teens have also mobilized politically, including when the city was proposing budget cuts to public libraries. All of these examples are moments when adults and teens come together in focused projects centered on shared purpose, which motivate their ongoing learning and inquiry. While the initial design of YOUmedia focused on workshops as a way of guiding kids to more in-depth engagements, mentors have increasingly turned toward these shared projects and performances that engage broader publics (Sebring et al. 2013), indicating growing attention to the shared purpose principle of connected learning.

Production and Performance

In addition to purposeful learning, hands-on learning that comes from actively creating, making, producing, experimenting, remixing, decoding, performing, and designing is engaging and resilient. With these activities, learning becomes tied to self-expression and identity, supported in a group context. Drawing from longstanding traditions in creativity, arts, and media education, connected learning environments provide tools and opportunities for learners to produce, circulate, curate, and comment on media. Media creation has become widely accessible through digital tools, and social media provide unprecedented opportunities for circulating, publicizing, and commenting on media works. Some of the ways the reach and power of production and performance may be extended through digital and networked tools include:

Access to digital production tools: Online and digital tools mean that diverse forms of self-expression are abundant, accessible, and often free. Whether for music, graphic design, or performing arts, high-quality production tools are rich resources to support diverse forms of self-expression.

Remixing and curating: Digital content isn't just about viewing and consumption, but also is uniquely open to appropriation and remix. Digital literacy isn't just about creating "original" content; it's also about curating, reframing, sampling, and remixing. These forms of expression are often valuable stepping-stones to creativity.

Circulation and visibility: Digital media easily can be uploaded, shared, and discussed. One of the most important affordances of today's digital media is that they offer new contexts for circulation and publicity in the form of blogs, podcasts, and video-sharing sites. The opportunity to share and gain audiences for youth work is crucial for learning and feedback.

All of the adult-led activities at YOUmedia are oriented toward media production and performance. Although teens in the space are not always actively engaged in production and performance, there are abundant opportunities and invitations for them to engage. Workshops related to production skills are advertised throughout the space, and both the signature projects and the online site showcase the work of the teens and mentors. The space also provides tools and resources for production, performance, and circulation, which include online instructional context, as well as the digital media hardware and software available on site. The signature projects are opportunities for shared purpose, as well as opportunities for visibility and circulation to different audiences.

Open Networks

Today's digital networks provide new opportunities for learners to access a wide range of knowledge and resources across the boundaries of school, home, and afterschool settings. They also allow learners to make their own work and achievements visible across these settings. This ability can mean accessing online educational resources at home and school, uploading self-produced content to shared learning spaces, or receiving credit for self-directed learning at school or work. These affordances of digital and mobile communication networks greatly expand opportunities to connect learning experiences and outcomes across the often fragmented settings of a young person's life. Young people need to be cognizant of privacy risks and appropriate boundaries of communication while also being encouraged to take advantage of the learning opportunities inherent in open networks. Learning is most resilient when it is linked and reinforced across settings of home, school, peer culture, and community.

The infrastructure of connected learning environments is based on principles of openness, accessibility, transparency, and extensibility to keep barriers to entry and participation low. In online spaces, it means maintaining transparent and open standards that

allow for people and institutions to connect and extend infrastructure across diverse settings (home, community, and school) and technical platforms (mobile, PC, game devices, and traditional media). In physical spaces, it means maintaining an open-door policy and using online infrastructures to extend beyond physical boundaries to allow greater access to resources and connect across institutions and communities. Enabling this openness may be a challenge, requiring institutions to adapt existing infrastructures and policies that limit access to certain sites or mobile technologies. Some ways of leveraging open networks to expand learning opportunity include:

Cross-institutional networks: Social and communication networks in a connected learning environment link out to other learning institutions, schools, popular culture, and home contexts. The online platforms used by the environment should be accessible in all of these contexts, and there should be mechanisms, such as feeds and widgets, that enable young people to make their activity in the connected learning environment visible (by choice) to networks associated with school, work, other interest groups, or peer culture. Cross-institutional networks also can take the form of projects that are part of coursework; collaborations with other groups and institutions; attraction of visitors; or site visits to other museums, libraries, workplaces, or schools.

Multiple points of entry and outreach: Young people and adult staff ideally can enter connected learning environments through multiple channels, including those centered on friendship, interests, or schools. The environment should not rely on a single pipeline for participants to learn about and join the group. The opportunities offered by the space can be public and publicized in ways that are attractive and accessible to diverse youth, parents, and educators.

Open assessments, badges, and certifications: Connected learning environments strive to recognize learning and achievement that happens in self-directed, informal, and unstructured contexts, making that learning visible and recognizable to parents, educators, workplaces, and learning institutions. This activity can take the form of resume building, packaging of creative work, or more formalized assessment, badges, and certification that recognize interest-driven learning.

Open access and intellectual property: Resources, tools, and materials should be abundant, accessible, and visible across settings, as well as available through open, networked platforms with public-interest policies that protect collective rights to circulate and access knowledge and culture. While most learning environments can't operate completely independent of proprietary intellectual property standards, there should be a robust core of resources that are free for participants to use, distribute, and modify.

YOUmedia's location in a public library means that it has an open-door policy and is guided by the library's mission of providing open access to information. In many ways,

the openly networked principle of connected learning is most evident in this policy of access to the physical infrastructure of the space and library resources. Within the walls of YOUmedia, activities of young people who are in workshops or deeply engaged in media production are visible to other participants who are hanging out with friends, thus facilitating exposure to new interests. In addition, YOUmedia mentors create opportunities to showcase the achievements of the youth. They feature superior work on the iRemix platform and display it in prominent places in the physical space.

On the online and digital side, the iRemix social network is available to help youth stay connected with their YOUmedia peers and mentors at home and school. In addition to the members-only network of iRemix, youth have also pushed for visibility outside of the local YOUmedia network, and individual projects have made use of blogs, Facebook, and Tumblr as a way of engaging in more open networks and gaining broader visibility (Sebring et al. 2013). Although the program does not have an explicit open IP or remix policy, many of the projects draw from open resources. Signature projects also make use of online publishing opportunities to achieve broader visibility. For example, the YOULit literary magazine has gradually been growing a national readership. One teen said, ''We do have readers from outside Chicago and outside YOUmedia... Yeah like, we got a ton of page views. It's amazing'' (CCSR). The efforts to connect with programs and opportunities in Chicago and nationally are also examples of YOUmedia's openly networked approach.

FIGURING OUT WHAT I LOVE TO DO

BY DOMINIQUE JAMES

Whenever I'm asked how I was first introduced to YOUmedia, I blush, saying how I came because I liked a boy. Every day after school, I went to YOUmedia to hang out with said boy and watch him record raps in the music studio. From my first day there, the mentors reached out to me. "Brother" Mike Hawkins recognized me from poetry events and invited me to join the spoken word group. From there, my involvement in YOUmedia began to include both the literary and twenty-first century learning aspects of the library.

During my four years visiting YOUmedia, it has become a space of comfort. I am comfortable exploring new technologies, ideas, relationships, possibilities, careers, the list goes on. I come to YOUmedia to have fun. I come to talk. I come to read. I come to do all of the things I like in the convenience of one space. YOUmedia has been instrumental in me figuring out what it is I love to do. All of the new things I've experienced in high school I tried at YOUmedia first. It means a lot to me to know I can reach out to Brother Mike, explaining my new interest in film, and have him provide me with a mentor and several workshops to attend. Before film, it was music production, before that, web design, and always, poetry. At YOUmedia, I have been exposed to many outlets of expression and the possible careers associated with them. For me, YOUmedia connects to what I want to do more than school does. Though senioritis may be a factor in my current dislike for school, I think there are other key contributors. Though I am blessed to go to Walter Payton Prep, one of the best schools in the country, the opportunities to explore my interests seem scarce compared to those at YOUmedia. However, YOUmedia has provided the experiences necessary to decide what I want to pursue in college and has helped in school. My options for projects have been greatly expanded as I have gained knowledge in graphic and web design, music production, and cinematography.

I've had great experiences with YOUmedia. I've been able to have my work read by my favorite author, Toni Morrison; work with Lady Gaga; and read poetry across the country. Moreover, I've been able to explore and discover new interests and tinker around until I found a passion. This would all be impossible without the mentors. Before they are mentors, they are friends. They are approachable whether the topic is educational or personal. YOUmedia differs from school because learning at YOUmedia is not mandatory. You pursue what you want, not something you are forced into. The mentors fall in line with this, making themselves and your learning options readily available without pushing you into something. The mentors are encouraging and supportive, as mentioned before, in areas both educational and personal. Some teachers at school do try to forge personal relationships, but the environment and time constraints prevent them from flourishing as they do at YOUmedia.

I am frequently on advising panels that help other groups interested in opening new YOUmedias. I am always apprehensive about other people trying to replicate something so dear to me. Because I do not know anything else like MY YOUmedia, I am bound to think it is a unique space that can't be reproduced. Because of the library's central location, it is made accessible to an entire city known for its division. Because of the diversity of the mentors, the diverse student population at YOUmedia feels comfortable talking to everyone. Because YOUmedia capitalizes on the cultural institutions of Chicago outside of the library, the experience is enhanced. I think the three key factors to YOUmedia's success are its accessibility, mentors, and emphasis on exhibition of student work. I am grateful for YOUmedia and the friends I have gained, peers and mentors alike. I am always uneasy about the unfair opportunities I get going to my school and knowing the disparities that permeate the Chicago Public School System. I like that YOUmedia is open to everyone and not fake open like a lot of other institutions that open their doors and not their arms.

It should go without saying: I am glad I met that boy the August before my freshman year and was able to be a part of YOUmedia through high school. I can't wait to find ways to stay connected in college.

OUTCOMES AND GOALS

When connected learning environments are built around production, shared purpose, and open networks, we see outcomes that are both individual and collective in nature. At the individual level, young people acquire skills and knowledge in the wide-ranging areas and disciplines to which connected learning can apply, including arts, humanities, science, engineering, gaming, athletics, activism, and civic action. Youth also develop positive learning dispositions, as well as social and cultural capital, as they are able to connect their interest-driven worlds; intergenerational relationships; and academic, civic, and career opportunities. Research on the first three years of operation has indicated that YOUmedia supports the development of digital media skills, academic skills and orientation, and the pursuit of interests. Not surprisingly, these outcomes, particularly digital media skills, are strongest for the young people who are highly engaged creators. Even relatively casual participants report that YOUmedia supports interest development, greater academic orientation, and improved communication with adults (Sebring et al. 2013).

These findings suggest that an environment like YOUmedia is able to support discipline-specific skills and knowledge, as well as a range of outcomes that are more social and relational in nature and could result from any connected learning experience regardless of interest area. In evaluating the outcomes of informal and connected learning environments, we advocate for attention to learning measures that are keyed to these social and relational outcomes. Specifically, we feel it is important to evaluate whether youth have developed relationships with mentors or peers in their area of interest and whether they were able to connect their area of interest to academic, civic, or career opportunity. While social environments that center on youth choice and self-determination may not always provide the same kinds of specific skill and knowledge development delivered in more structured learning settings, they excel in developing relationships that tie teens directly to social and cultural capital and opportunity in the wider world.

We also stress that designs and outcomes need to be considered at both collective and individual levels. Practically and conceptually, an exclusive focus on individual outcomes, skills, knowledge, and development fails to illuminate what is most central and effective about the social and collaborative nature of the connected learning approach. This occurrence is particularly true of drop-in environments like YOUmedia Chicago. By design, individual participation and outcomes vary widely in environments that are designed for choice, multiple pathways, and diverse roles. These kinds of environments–because they support a diverse array of interests–don't have a clear set of individual outcomes to measure that directly reflect the effectiveness of the program as a whole. Conversely, many programs successfully deliver individual gains and foster a culture of competitiveness, while failing to foster meaningful relationships, a sense of collective purpose, and connections in the wider world. The effectiveness of the program is best characterized by the diversity of individual gains, as well as the overall health of the collective environment. An environment with low barriers to entry and multiple pathways for participation necessarily includes more casual forms of "lurking" and "hanging out," creating

opportunities for teens to explore new potential interests in a low-risk way. This type of interaction, which may not translate to measurable gains in skills, is nonetheless important for environments that are broadening points of access and engagement.

In order to provide guidance to other programs seeking to design settings with similar goals, this report focuses on the collective outcomes that we believe characterize a thriving connected learning environment. Documentation of these collective outcomes can be pursued in tandem with more traditional individual assessments as appropriate to the specific program, area, and discipline. These collective outcomes include: (1) a supportive and safe environment for pursuing interests and expertise, (2) exposure to depth and breadth of interests, and (3) stronger links between interests and opportunity. These outcomes will be illustrated by drawing on empirical evidence gathered by New York University's Connecting Youth: Digital Learning Research Project (CY) research team and the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR). The source of each interview excerpt in this section of the report will be identified as either CY or CCSR.

Summary of Collective Outcomes of YOUmedia Chicago

1. **A supportive and safe environment for developing interests and expertise**
   - Intergenerational relationships centered on shared interests, identity and mutual respect
   - A safe peer culture that values intellectual and creative excellence

2. **Exposure to a breadth and depth of interests**
   - Discovery of new interests
   - Deepening and extending existing interests

3. **Connecting interests to opportunity in the wider world**
   - Publication, publicity, and recognition in the wider world
   - Orientation toward academics and careers

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1. A SUPPORTIVE AND SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR DEVELOPING INTERESTS AND EXPERTISE

Young people have a limited number of times and spaces where they can socialize with peers and have autonomy within the context of a safe, adult-sanctioned, and well-resourced space. Most youth-driven peer activity happens in the gaps and margins of educational institutions, such as in the cafeterias, hallways, and locker rooms at school during in-between times such as breaks, lunch, and after school. Teens take advantage of online social networks as spaces where they can congregate with their peers, but there are highly variable amounts of adult oversight, guidance, and support in these online spaces. At YOUmedia, teens are provided with a physical space to hang out with friends where they also have access to adult mentors who can help them pursue their interests and provide social support.

YOUmedia is a safe space where young people have access to relationships with caring adults and peers, which center on creative and intellectual interests. Young people feel supported in developing identities and interests that are not about the jockeying for status and popularity common in their school-centered peer networks. One staff member described the culture they seek to cultivate:

> I think we work towards an atmosphere where everyone is respected... Here, expertise is expertise. Knowledge is knowledge. In school, it may be appreciated in a different way. In this space, it's appreciated in kind of a more practical way. Joe [a YOUmedia teen participant] knows video games. The hip-hop kids know that, and if they're interested in gaming or if there's a conversation about video gaming, he's going to get the respect overall. There are kids who know music, who just know artists; they're at the spoken word. They're performers... It comes to a conversation or something where someone needs to know about an artist or know about something that's happening in that realm; that's where you go, period. It's respected. Now, I'm sure it's like that in school in some ways, but the library, it's that third space that doesn't come with those same walls of social hierarchy (CY).

This staff person also described how the staff help teens break through the social hierarchies that might separate them in formal educational institutions, saying:

> We pull down the walls and ask teens to sort of come as the people that they are. You can keep your social statuses, like as the best dressed or the elitist social girls and stuff like that. In the workshop, you can be who you hope to be. That does happen. Everybody has that with them, and it sort of brings down the hubris of, "I'm in this social circle." Like, dude, you're in the library (CY).

The presence of adults in the space ensures that young people feel protected from the more negative aspects of peer relationships. At the same time, youth are able to retain the autonomy to bring friends into the space and the ability to pursue activities based on their own interests and schedules. As one teen put it:

> The purpose of YOUmedia is to find a place for people who don't exactly fit in with the society around them. It's kind of like an outsider's paradise, but it's also a place for people who do "fit in," quote unquote. It's a place... to foster education, to foster interest, creativity, and to really reinforce and help kids, really. (CCSR)

At YOUmedia, teen contributions to the community are valued, and they are rewarded for creative and intellectual excellence. When describing how he was able to pursue his passion for writing at YOUmedia, this teen reiterated the importance of adult interest:

> I write a lot. I come in here and talk about my ideas for writing and show my writing off to the mentors. I feel like it's helpful. I've always been a person that, unfortunately, is a little sensitive to criticism. They deliver it in a way that's highly palatable. I had a very thin skin around it, but I think that was around people

who were a little too harsh with my writing. Here, I feel like they're not as harsh with it, but also I trust them more. Say your mom telling that you're good is like... and to people who actually know what they're doing–sorry, mom. Yeah, I feel like I'm getting professional guidance, but not in a detrimental way (CY).

In order to foster a culture where teens feel comfortable asking them for support, YOUmedia staff place a high value on listening to what teens have to say and promoting healthy debate when there are differences of opinion. One YOUmedia staff member explained her approach with teens:

We always listen to what the kids have to say. We don't denigrate the kids for their interests. We ask them to explain why they like something to us. If we don't totally agree with them, then you know, we don't say, "Oh you're stupid. That's dumb." We'll try and have a longer discussion about it. We have lots of debates at the front desk. We accept what they like, and we listen. I think that's the biggest thing. You don't dismiss a kid (CY).

This approach seems to be working, as the teens at YOUmedia are overwhelmingly positive about their interaction with the staff. When asked to describe the staff, teens were often grateful to find adults who share their interests:

They're [the staff] really friendly. They're people that I feel like I can talk to them about anything that I need to. If I'm interested in something, then that's good. The best part is, if I need a book they can help me. If I'm interested in a game, they can talk to me about it, and I can try it out. I can really talk to them about different things (CY).

The teens value the interest-based support that mentors are able to provide, but also are excited to connect with like-minded peers. The ability to form relationships based on shared interests and mutual respect is key to creating a space where teens feel welcomed and valued by staff and peers.

Intergenerational relationships centered on shared interests, identity, and mutual respect

The relationships young people form with mentors differ from the traditional student-teacher relationship by being less authority-driven and more support-oriented. Here, successful intergenerational relationships are centered on shared interests, identity, and mutual respect. Teens indicate that the relationships they form with the adults at YOUmedia are meaningful and help them to feel welcome in the space. While the technology might be the initial draw for many teens who frequent the space, most say they keep returning to YOUmedia because of the relationships they've formed with mentors and peers. One teen described why he first came to YOUmedia:

Basically, it was probably the video games. I mean just being here, being able to play with all my friends after school in a place that's three blocks away, not even. Just, it's too cool and too fun. Yeah, that's basically why I got here first (CY).

When asked why he keeps coming back to YOUmedia, he said:

> The people, the video games, the technology, all of it. Mostly, actually, it's probably the people that I meet here and all the mentors and stuff. I talk to them more than I play video games (CY).

Another teen concurred:

> Mentors, the people. I mean, I think it's a great technological space and that there's lots of great technology here. I feel like without the people, it's just a room with machines. I feel like the mentors here are the best asset that the library has (CY).

Many teens describe the space as "feeling like home." One in particular said that he described the YOUmedia staff like family members because:

> YOUmedia is my family, I told you, I love it. Literally... I told you, I'm a foster child; I don't even have a place that I feel safe physically. And wherever I feel safe would be my home. And this is like my home. That's why I come every day (CCSR).

Another teen explained his impressions of the mentors:

> I guess YOUmedia has made me believe that there are actually some cool adults in this world. Just the mentors again, they are some of the most perfect human beings I've ever met. I didn't know that adults could actually be that cool. I didn't know that, hey, you could actually be this old and still be as interested into games and stuff as you used to be when you were kids or even more. Just like, that's really cool. Being able to talk to people that know what they're talking about and being able to teach me new things that I was interested in. Yeah, I've made some pretty close relationships. I think that some people think that I actually am too comfortable with the adults here.

When asked why he would be "too comfortable," the teen said:

> No, I don't know, because I just walk over. I don't know, maybe—I don't remember how I introduced myself to them years ago. I don't think it was just me putting my arm over the table, just going, "Hey guys, what do you want to talk about today?" I don't know, it's just like everyone I see—I mean everyone's really, really casual with the adults here. I guess it's just that we could talk as if we were like best friends who were just going to school together or something. Yeah... Just because I'm younger than all of them does not mean I am lower than them. It just means that I am almost as high as them (CY).

Another teen shared this sense of comfort with the mentors:

> They are more understanding. I feel like they are not really judgmental of some things, and they listen, which I haven't gotten very much of, and yeah. I feel like they're easier to talk to. Like they're not just these kind of somewhat high-strung

authority figures. You know they're people, and they're older than you. So, there's a certain amount of respect that you can give, but you can also talk to them on a level that I feel like I couldn't really talk to another adult without getting uncomfortable.

Teens at YOUmedia often describe their relationships with mentors as distinct from the relationships they have with other adults who have power and authority in their lives, such as teachers and parents. The shared view is that mentors at YOUmedia treat them with respect and not like children. One teen, who described the YOUmedia mentors as "older siblings" whom she could approach for help in "all aspects of her life," did not feel that adults outside of YOUmedia treated teens with the same respect. She said:

Here, I know they probably view us as teens, but they don't treat us like we're children. Outside of this space, a lot of adults will be like, "Oh, you're just a child. You're young. You don't know what you're talking about." They already have that mentality because they're either more experienced or they've known you for so long... they're like, "Oh no, my precious baby. Don't do anything bad." I could probably tell them [mentors] a lot more than I would tell my mother and my father, or a teacher, or someone else outside of this space (CY).

In many ways, the mentors and staff form the foundation for the culture that exists at YOUmedia. The teens respect them and trust them, which creates a safe environment where interest exploration and learning can take place. The mentors also act as role models for the teens. One teen commented:

It's like, "Oh, man!" YOUmedia just, like, made my life, like, a million times better just because I meet adults who I wish I could be when I grow up. When I grow up, I want to become a YOUmedia mentor (CCSR).

The mentors also embody the culture and creativity of the interest areas being served by the space. By performing or displaying their own art or expertise, YOUmedia staff expose youth to new interests and enhance their credibility as knowledge holders. Even as they describe the comfort and mutual respect, teens acknowledge the expertise that the mentors and staff possess. One teen described how mentors help support his interest in writing and blogging:

Cuz people in here are into that a lot. People they'd know have extensive knowledge of it. They're all college-educated professionals. They can help you with it, intellectually, technologically, and all that. It's an environment with the mentors that fosters a creativity, and it reinforces your interests. It makes you feel good about yourself (CCSR).

Connected learning environments aspire to make young people feel safe and supported by their peers while they are pursuing intellectual and creative pursuits. The mentors are key to creating this atmosphere of camaraderie, as well as modeling and sharing skills and expertise.

A safe peer culture that values intellectual and creative excellence

When the environment is one that invites creative and intellectual exploration and excellence, young people reach out to each other based on shared interests, rather than primarily for status or popularity. Many young people struggle to find friends in their local peer group who share their interests, or their interests may have low status or be marginalized among peers at school or in their neighborhoods. Connected learning environments provide a context where young people can be part of a community of peers who share interests and identities that might not be available at school. Teens talk about the relationships they formed in YOUmedia as different from the status negotiations they deal with in high school. When asked how teens she met at YOUmedia might differ from her peers at school or in her neighborhood, one young woman said:

> I mean, I feel they're a little smarter, a little nicer, little more accepting. Things like that... Like, they're more accepting of who you are. They're better at communicating. They're into the same things you are. They like the same things you do (CCSR).

Acceptance was a common theme in teens' talk about YOUmedia, especially for those teens who felt alienated in their schools or neighborhoods. For one teen, coming to YOUmedia gave her the chance to realize an identity that felt more consistent with her true self than the identity she presented in her neighborhood:

> I feel like my neighborhood is just kind of a picky, choosy, judging kind of place, and I feel like I can be myself here more than–I feel like I'm two different people sometimes, but it's nice to come here.

When asked what parts of herself she was unable to fulfill in her neighborhood, she said:

> Everything. I guess people have described me as being kind of weird, and I really don't understand it. I don't feel like I'm weird. But, like, I guess in my neighborhood, they listen to a certain kind of music that I don't, and they dress a certain kind of way that I don't, and they watch shows that I don't and listen to artists that I don't, like other celebrities that I don't, and read books that I have no interest in. I try to talk to them, or just I guess have some kind of slight friendship with the people in my neighborhood just because you know I live there, but it's failed every time. I just got tired of trying (CY).

She went on to explain how both shared interests and the willingness of teens at YOUmedia to engage in discussion about different interests made it easier to make friends there:

> It seems like we're all different, but... somewhere along the line, we'll all have at least one interest that is somewhat the same. You'll never have a dull conversation with anybody here, and you'll find that almost everyone has some kind of common interest with you and that you can kind of work on that a little bit more and just develop not just friendships, but I guess you can even learn from people (CY).

Another young person described how YOUmedia is "a place for me to hang out with the people that I relate to–nerds" (CCSR). The space attracts both "nerds" and creative kids, as well as invites young people to display those identities that may be more hidden in the school peer context. It also enables young people to find and connect with kids who share these interests when there may not be a critical mass at school: "I do YOULit Magazine here, which is the online literary magazine. And that's a lot of fun. People I wouldn't have, like, met before because we all go to different schools" (CCSR).

The space is designed not only to draw out young people's creative and intellectual interests and identities, but also to allow space to display them by playing games together, or performing in ways that can be viewed and heard by other youth. The visibility of interests at YOUmedia also allowed teens who attended the same school but were not friends to connect. One teen explained:

> Actually, the majority of the people that were on my podcast that we host here at YOUmedia are from [my school]. I met almost all of them through just being at YOUmedia, not through being friends with them at school. YOUmedia seems to have weeded out the cool kids. For all the people that go to [my school], it's like the people that I'd seen sometimes at [my school], I glanced at them, I said hi to them before. Once we noticed that we all go to YOUmedia together, we just became awesome friends knowing that we all have the same interest and stuff. Then we've become best friends since then and some of them have since graduated, and it's all been very sad. It's really weird thinking that without YOUmedia we wouldn't have been as awesome friends (CY).

Combined with the informal and fluid nature of this space, interest visibility creates open invitations for connection and mutual appreciation. One participant described how this helped him start conversations at YOUmedia:

> In taking people that normally go to school and people that normally go to YOUmedia, I guess, yes, they're quite different in that I can just maybe jump up and talk to them. Since they're playing a video game, I can realize, it's like, "Oh, maybe I can talk to them about video games because he seems to be interested in video games. I guess I can talk to him." It's not like you can go to school and be like, "Oh, he's writing an essay about U.S. history. Maybe I can talk to him about the history of America?" and stuff (CCSR).

Another young person illustrated how the visibility of interests coupled with the culture of YOUmedia creates circumstances where new collaborative projects might take place:

> Yesterday I came in. I wasn't really feeling a song coming out of my heart. I wasn't feeling a beat coming out of my hands... I went out, and I started looking around. And it just so happened that there was a young lady sitting at the piano outside the studio, playing. And it seemed that she was singing along. I approached her, and I asked her if she wanted to come into the studio. And she said yes. And so I asked her what does she do? She said she sings and plays the piano... I just got to

know her... She told me that she had a song that she really wanted to get out. And so, what I did with her is, we engineered a beat from scratch. We made her song go from nothingness just in her head into a full-fledged production. She recorded that song and took it home and played it for her friends (CCSR).

At its best, YOUmedia shows teens that they are not alone in their interests and passions and that they don't have to hide the fact that they care deeply about things. It invites them to crawl out from the protective mask of cynicism so common to adolescents:

> Interviewer: What have you learned from your time at YOUmedia or using YOUmedia online?
> Interviewee: What have I learned? I've learned a lot... cuz I'm a cynic, but I've learned the goodness of people from being here. I've learned how just kind and generous and thoughtful people really... because I thought I was going to be the only one who was like that... So it's really awakened me. I'm less cynical. Still very cynical, but less. It's [YOUmedia] taught me that. You know, it's taught me how to be a better writer, be a better journalist, be a better person, be a better friend, really. Just overall, being better at things I'm into (CCSR).

Connecting with other teens in a space that privileges and celebrates enthusiasm, rather than apathy, creates an environment where young people are able to share their interests with others and explore new possibilities.

2. EXPOSURE TO A BREADTH AND DEPTH OF INTERESTS

When young people have friends and caring adults who share interests, they are more likely to enjoy and persist in that interest, as well as explore related interests. YOUmedia is an open space, with no dividers between areas for hanging out, messing around, and geeking out. The activities of young people–who are in workshops, deeply engaged in media production, or simply messing around on a gaming console or a keyboard– are visible to other participants who are hanging out with friends, thus facilitating exposure to new interests. On top of this, YOUmedia mentors produce opportunities to showcase the achievements of their interest-driven learners through the signature projects and display spaces in both the physical and online space.

Discovery of new interests

Teens at YOUmedia recognize that the space provides them with unique opportunities. These opportunities include the structured workshops and signature events coordinated by the mentors, but also encompass the freedom youth feel to experiment with new interests:

> If you're at a place where you're like, "What am I gonna do with myself?" You come up in here and be like, "Wow, I have a whole future ahead of me. Let me just do all of this stuff and wild out and figure out what I want to do with my life." So I think that's what it's good for... I think it's definitely a place of opportunity (CY).

In addition to experimenting on their own, young people at YOUmedia often describe how a mentor or a librarian guided them to a new interest they may not otherwise have discovered. These new explorations are often facilitated through the existing trusted relationships between youth and between youth and mentors. One teen discussed how a librarian at YOUmedia helped her develop a new interest:

> Interviewee: Well, right now I'm in this workshop. It's called Development of App, and I'm creating an app right now. So that's what I'm interested (in). I'm not really interested in studio and all that stuff.

> Interviewer: So… that started when you came here? Your interest in the app program, making apps?

> Interviewee: Well, I was actually… trying to look for an acting type of workshop. Like, I was suggesting a glee club here. But then one of the librarians introduced me to this group, and I'm like, "Oh, this is very interesting." So you know, it's good to do new things, so I get that (CCSR).

Other young people have similarly described how they discovered new interests and activities through invitations from the mentors. One young man explained how a mentor with whom he connected helped him expand his interests:

> Originally… I didn't want to attend any of the workshops and stuff. I was like, "Just sitting in front of adults talking about trying to teach you stuff, oh whatever, I don't want to do that." Then she forced me in, I guess, into the graphic

design workshops and stuff like that. I was like "Oh great, this is actually kind of interesting. That's nice." Then I started coming there [to the workshop] weekly and stuff and had a lot of fun. That's one of the things that she got me into. I feel like it's helped me branch out in a lot of things, and it's helped me. I feel like there were a lot of things that I felt like I couldn't do or that other people told me that I shouldn't do. And then, I came here and I get the opposite. You know, I get basically pushed into that direction whether I want to do it or not. Yeah. I feel like it gives you an opportunity to even–I've even started liking more things (CY).

Teens are also exposed to new ways to use technology by mentors, which leads to new interest development for some. One young woman said:

Before I came here, my habits online were just basically browsing around and hitting the F5 button as many times as I could. Since I've come here, they've [the mentors] introduced me to so many programs and so many things that I can use. I've actually been inspired to draw! (CY)

Beyond nudges to participate in new activities by mentors, simply being around teens who were passionate about their creative pursuits sparked new interests for some:

My friend, who's actually been doing some videos with Adobe After Effects. I'm actually thinking about getting into Flash animation because of that. I'm sure someone here can help with that, too (CY).

Because interests are performed and made obvious in the space, teens are exposed to a wide variety of interests they might not have access to at home or school:

I learned a lot more about the arts altogether [at YOUmedia]. Most of the people that come here have a main interest. Me, I just dabble in a little bit of everything. I just help people out. Most of the people that come here are very artsy. I've met some very, very passionate people. Oh my goodness, very, very passionate people that I think can go places. I've learned more about music and how people perceive different types of music. I've listened to different types of poetry. You hear poetry is mostly intimate, most of the time, so you hear about what different people go through... Even meeting people that like to do that in different styles. So, I would just say I've learned more about the arts here than in school and more than outside of school (CY).

YOUmedia staff also recognize the importance of YOUmedia in encouraging teens to explore and develop new interests:

You know, I think the space helps them to sort of round their interests. I hope that they see what they can get into. I think it does happen. I think their interest paradigm is being expanded. Their realm of interest is being expanded based on the things that they see in the library. Yeah, we see teens come in, and they're freshmen, and they're not interested in anything at all that goes on in this space

outside of game systems. Then eventually they gravitate towards a workshop that they see, and sometimes they join, and sometimes they just sort of mess around in it. At least they're exposed to other teens' interests. Even the levels of intensity within those interests, like teens who totally geek out with gaming, they see that there are different levels of interest and stuff or teens that are into fashion or teens that are into programming and stuff like that (CY).

Discovery of new interests requires a safe environment for expressing interests, as well as the presence of adults and peers who can encourage a young person to try out something new. Importantly, the environment must also be welcoming to young people who are not actively pursuing an interest. In this respect, YOUmedia differs from structured programs that require a young person to explicitly sign up for an interest activity in order to participate. YOUmedia invites passive observations as a first step toward active engagement.

Deepening and extending existing interests

In addition to discovering new interests, YOUmedia supports young people deepening existing interests or finding new ways to apply their interests and expertise. This deepening can happen within the context of the structured workshops that are offered in the space if they build on existing interests.

> Interviewer: Okay. And I know that you're a big, like, critical commentary person... It sounds like this workshop gave you an opportunity to bring that critical commentary eye, if you will, to music.
> Interviewee: Yeah. I mean, it caused me to write this ten-page article on Bruce Springsteen. It kind of inspired me to do that. Because, I mean, I've been analyzing music in my head with a critical eye before. So it's not just, like, out of the blue this thing reinvented everything I knew. But it gave me a focus in a workshop to work with it that hadn't existed before—that I had been doing on my own and not as effectively beforehand.
> Interviewer: How would you say that the workshop supported your interest in learning more about music?
> Interviewee: It basically supported it by talking about it, and by going. Because the thing is, with music, I usually just listen to it and think about it, and then this made me talk about it in a way that I'd... previously been talking about movies and video games, but I hadn't really been doing that with music. And this workshop allowed me to do that with music (CCSR).

This kind of extension of interests is dependent on mentors being attentive to existing interests and expertise and using that knowledge to construct new opportunities that build from an existing base. In addition to workshops, this extension can happen through the development of shared projects. In one instance, a group of teens was supported in developing a podcast series that drew a group of gamers into a creative production activity (see also Youth Stories: James and Signature Projects: Library of Games).

When asked why he decided to begin podcasting, this teen explained:

> Well, two years ago when I first came to YOUmedia to create this, it was actually Skylar [a YOUmedia staff member] who just walked up to us and asked us whether or not we wanted to talk about video games, since we came here... every day, every week during school, and we always played video games. And Skylar's like, "Oh, who here wants to talk about video games?" There was a bunch of us, sitting in front of a TV just playing, I dunno, like, Assassin's Creed or something. And two of us raised our hand. And we're like, "Oh, that's cool." And then we got together one day, and she brought us over here, and just showed us this text-based adventure game called Zork and stuff. And then she just decided, "Oh, let's record what you thought about the game." And then weeks went on, and more things, and we started to learn what we could possibly do, and then we started posting the podcasts on this website, and then we made–now the website, like, two years later is this awesome thing that we're planning to use, like, professionally, to get into conventions and stuff (CCSR).

For others, their peers' enthusiasm reignited dormant interests:

> And that's just–oh, I've always liked drawing, but I feel like I've gotten into it more here. I feel like for some reason getting to know more artists just made me want to draw more (CY).

Another said:

> There's like a book club for teens. So, I've experienced that. I've come here and done that. It actually got me reading again, and I really like books, so that was good (CY).

Other teens felt their interests were best supported through one-on-one interactions with YOUmedia staff. When discussing what he learned at YOUmedia, one young man explained how he grew as a writer:

> I learned how to read my own writing, how to critique myself, how to write much better. I've improved exponentially as a writer over the past four years. I learned how to engage in products, how to get my material out there, how to write, essentially how to become a professional almost. YOUmedia helped me take this interest I had and fostered it. It made me better at it. It made me do it in a professional manner. That's what I feel like's been the best part, and that's what is going to improve me (CY).

Again, an environment where young people can safely display their interests creates a natural draw for others to engage in that interest and step up to help others develop expertise. A common narrative in YOUmedia is of young people coming in with a casual or nascent interest and being able to access a set of social and programmatic supports

that focus that interest and give it a space for expression. As one teen described in relation to her interest in journalism, "It's helped me make it my main goal," transitioning her from "a raw writer to a more focused and sharp writer" (CCSR). This transition from a diffuse interest or identity to an actionable set of skills and orientations is key to connecting interests to opportunity in the wider world.

3. CONNECTING INTERESTS TO OPPORTUNITY IN THE WIDER WORLD

DYN mentors are professional and practicing artists–passionate about their areas of expertise and interest and connected with associated communities and professional networks. Library staff, while not necessarily professional artists, also find ways to incorporate their areas of interest and specialized knowledge into their interactions with teens. Not only do these adults mentor young people on a day-to-day basis to expand the range and depth of their interest areas, they also make efforts to expose YOUmedia participants to the broader world of activity associated with those areas. Not all interest groups are driven toward expertise and knowledge development. For example, many young people have interests in popular culture and recreational activities that center more on social belonging rather than pursuing reflection, deep knowledge, or skills development. Further, it is very common for young people's interests to be disconnected from more adult-facing domains such as academics, civics, or careers pathways, even if those domains are potentially relevant. Here, mentors serve as "connectors" that help youth see how their passions might be translated into economic, academic, or social opportunity. This is a role that mentors implicitly recognize and work to develop. One mentor said, "I hope that through the field trips and workshops and mentors and just library resources that they're seeing what they could potentially go into career-wise" (CY).

In order to forge these broader connections, mentors bring others from their field to the YOUmedia site to give performances and presentations. They support young people in shared projects and competitions that connect them to a broader network of peers and experts outside of the space. Through YOUmedia, young people are connected to internship opportunities and are mentored on how to display and advocate for their expertise and knowledge in resumes and applications.

Publication, publicity, and recognition in the wider world

Mentors and staff at YOUmedia make ongoing efforts to connect young people to opportunities to have their work recognized in the broader world. In fact, one young person, when asked about the purpose of YOUmedia, described the core purpose as "to get teens' art out there and, you know, because they don't really have a chance out in the real world." Teens at YOUmedia acknowledge that the mentors serve as connectors to important opportunities outside of the space. When asked what she thought about the mentors at YOUmedia, this young woman said:

> They help you get opportunities outside of here. I've known people that went to different states to perform for other people because of connections. Yeah, so they have very strong connections here, not just in YOUmedia, but outside so that they can help you get to where you want to go if you just ask. If you're passionate enough, then they can help you. I'm pretty positive they can help you. Yeah, I love the mentors here, all of them (CY).

> Teens describe their excitement about being able to connect with high-profile opportunities. One participant said, "They often have really big projects with famous artists, like celebrities, and you don't get that chance anywhere else." When asked for an example, he said, "I recently worked with the Born this Way Foundation, and I met Lady Gaga... I got a free ticket to Harvard to meet her and Oprah and other stuff, and that was pretty good. They've also had stuff for the musicians, and there are a lot of opportunities that just pop up out of nowhere" (CY).

Building on the mentor and peer support for interest and expertise development, these opportunities and recognitions can be transformative for young people. One young man described how he was afforded the opportunity to write for the Huffington Post because of his participation at YOUmedia:

> Basically, the Huffington Post asked them [YOUmedia] for the new Huffington Post high school thing, like they want teen writers to write for them. Unpaid, unfortunately, but it's worth it, yeah. And, you know, being able to see yourself published in Huffington Post, that's amazing! I'm working on an article to be published in Huffington Post soon. And if it wasn't for YOUmedia, I wouldn't have gotten the invitation. So I'm very, very excited for that (CCSR).

One of the benefits of being the first YOUmedia location, and having close ties to the MacArthur Foundation's DML initiative, is that the staff have access to unique opportunities to connect with large-scale youth initiatives. In several instances, the MacArthur Foundation and other DML partners brokered high-profile collaborative opportunities. However, even in the absence of major opportunities like Huffington Post publication or Born this Way Foundation activities, the online world provides space to publish and gain an audience. For example, the YOULit literary magazine has gradually been growing a national readership. These opportunities for recognition and connec-

tion in the wider world for YOUmedia participants' achievements in their interest areas present an exciting perk –something for which they clamor for more. When asked what he would like more of at YOUmedia, one teen opined:

> I mean, expand it, I mean, so that the things that people are interested in can travel outside of YOUmedia. I'm not saying it doesn't, but I'm saying, like, you know, oh, if I want to do photography. Oh, let me hook up with this Columbia student and, you know, maybe if they're having a film festival, we hook up with them and, you know, maybe I'll even get an opportunity to go on a college tour. You know, set up things like that. Or if there's a parade, oh, let's join in the people that are on the record label, and let's get something together for that. Like, let's have more functions, you know?

YOUmedia staff are cognizant of the need to create and maintain opportunities for youth to expand their reach outside of the space. For some of the staff, outreach is done on a case-by-case basis:

> It's really on a kid-by-kid basis. We try as much as possible to be connected to the larger media world in Chicago, so through things like Chicago Zinefest or Chicago Comic and Entertainment Expo, we just try and make sure that we know when it's happening, and what's going on, and what would be beneficial for our students. We find the groups that we–or the kids that we know that we think would benefit. It's not necessarily kids in one single workshop that we pull into programs like that. I think we just–we get to know kids at the desk one-on-one and try and pull them into opportunities like that.

Like when we did Chicago Ideas week, the group that was pulled together, they're just from one workshop. I mean they're kids from all different activities within the space who are pulled into that and got to work with that opportunity. Then we'll recommend other programs and projects to kids as they come along, but again it's really on a one-by-one basis. It's about knowing the kids well. We can't do that unless we actually get to know the kids pretty well. That doesn't necessarily have to happen in workshop.

This relationship-centric approach toward developing and constructing opportunities for youth is core to the YOUmedia experience.

Orientation toward academics and careers

The focus of the mentors' attention is expertise development in specific areas of interests. However, because YOUmedia supports deep relationships and invites informal social activity, peers and mentors support other areas of life, as well. Mentors function as role models and provide support for academic achievement and career mentoring, including helping young people consider pathways to college with an eye toward longer-term career aspirations in their areas of interest and aptitude. One young woman described how she talks about future plans with the staff at YOUmedia, saying "college

essays and prom... They help me in how to make my college essay... stronger, and you know, they picked out what should be taken out, what should be put in, and stuff like that" (CCSR). The most recent report by CCSR indicates that–although not an explicit focus of YOUmedia programming–academic supports are widely recognized by participating teens (Sebring et al. 2013).

Exposure to peers with high academic aspirations can also provide this supporting structure. For example, one young man described how he took a practice Advanced Placement (AP) exam with friends from YOUmedia.

> Interviewee: Last week on Tuesday, I took a practice AP exam on Tuesday... I met up with the guys at the YOUmedia, and we went up, took the test. I got a 5 on it, so.
> Interviewer: Nice.
> Interviewee: Pretty awesome. But, you know, YOUmedia kind of introduced me to that stuff. Like, I might not have taken that AP practice test if it hadn't been for YOUmedia (CCSR).

Another young person described how YOUmedia was a key factor in the decision to aspire to attend college:

> "I wouldn't have been getting ready for this college opportunity if it had not been for YOUmedia really. I'm going to the Art Institute for audio production. And I was not thinking about audio production eight months ago" (CCSR).

This is not an isolated event, as a staff member relayed in a story of a young woman she helped guide toward higher education:

> One student has an amazing photography portfolio. I asked if she was thinking about college, and she gave me the cold shoulder. [Laughter] I left it alone, and then she came back to me. I think it just planted the seed. A lot of times, that's what we need. That's what we do, and that can be enough. She returned two or three weeks later and said, "Can we go to the School of the Art Institute of Chicago [SAIC]?" "Sure," I said. "Let's go." Then she told me that her mom was like, "Oh, that was a great conversation. Why don't you think about college?" She's graduating this year. She had not done her ACTs or any type of exams because she did not plan on going to college. I told her that I would get her an interview at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, but the rest is your own. If you have that desire in you, you will proceed. If not, just drop it or don't even show up.

> She went to the interview, and she went there with her mother. They came back over here, and they were so happy because it's a very exclusive institution, so there's a lot of proving yourself to qualify. Her portfolio was approved, but that didn't mean that she was approved. Then she said, "Okay, I'm going to study for my exams." She took her exams. This weekend, I got this message, "I have been accepted to the SAIC!" (CY)

By connecting with a supportive adult, this teen was able to–perhaps for the first time–envision a trajectory for formally pursuing her interest in an institution of higher learning. The staff member was able to tap into the teen's interest in photography and make visible a pathway for acceptance to SAIC, a prestigious and exclusive arts school. In doing so, she made clear the linkage between interest and academic success that is so often hidden from youth. While the staff member's connections to SAIC were instrumental in gaining access to the school, it was ultimately the teen's passion for photography and her relationship with the mentor that allowed for this opportunity to blossom.

Relationships with YOUmedia staff help teens connect interest, academics, and opportunity. One teen, because of a mentor's encouragement and editing support, was able to earn a higher grade on a school project and leverage his schoolwork into an opportunity to be published in the YOUmedia publication, YouLit:

> I wrote an English thing for school and... it was okay, I guess. Then I took it over to YOUmedia for them to read it, and someone told me a bunch of tips on how to do things. Then I sent it back to them [at school], and they gave me a really high grade for it. I was like, "Oh, hey, that's awesome." Then I gave it back to YOUmedia after it was done with the grade, and then they put that in the YOULit magazine in here. I was like, "Oh! It works both ways. That's awesome!" I'm not even into writing or anything, but if what they told me helped it out that much, then that's awesome (CY).

By building a safe and supportive environment where young people can discover interests, deepen expertise, and connect these interests to the wider world, YOUmedia is guiding young people to these longer-term successes and aspirations. YOUmedia mentors also are helping teens to make connections between their interests and possible career or academic pathways. As described in the Youth Story about James, his conversation with one of the YOUmedia librarians, who is a gamer herself, was transformative. Hearing about her career trajectory, which involved jumping around and trying different things, led James to the realization that "God! I might actually be able to do something." He continued:

> Because hearing that–it wasn't all perfect and everything–I don't know what I was expecting... I want to do something with video games. I want to draw. I think that hearing her, hearing a story of someone who actually got a job in what she's interested in, helped (CY).

His conversation not only exposed James to a new career path, it also helped him understand how he might connect the interests he was pursuing at YOUmedia (i.e., gaming and graphic design) to a future career opportunity.

Another teen, through discussions with mentors, came to realize that having an alternate career path emphasizing technology would be a good backup plan:

I wanted to become an actor and producer, a songwriter, and a writer, and stuff. Now [because of YOUmedia], like, I'll probably go to college to learn a little more about technology, so I could become a director and one of those tech people, like, to make the explosions in the background, and the green screens and stuff (CCSR).

While focusing on academic achievements and career revelations can be tempting, the staff also recognize the importance of everyday learning moments:

We cling to the students who won the scholarship or the student whose work is awesome, but we also think it's important that students learn how to download something for the first time. This is the place where they learned it. A student is introduced to ProTools or Garage Band for the first time, and this is the place where they did it. Small successes are successes. Those are good things. We don't necessarily check those off, like Student A came in and finished his homework assignment here. It's a success, you know. We suggested the open source application form. We told this student about a book. Those are things that are good that make this space useful—more useful than we sometimes think (CY).

Because YOUmedia starts with interests and social relationships, academic pursuits become integrated into a broader sense of identity, personal pathways, and purpose. Knowledge and skills become means to broader goals that are aligned with a sense of identity and social belonging rather than purely means to the pursuit of academic achievement and recognition. As one teen put it, YOUmedia is "in all areas of my life, academically, socially, which is very good because, to me, those two are important" (CY). This orientation exemplifies the unique contribution that a connected learning environment plays in a young person's life in building relationships between the spheres of interests, peer culture, and academic achievement, which are often disconnected.

THE NEXT LEVEL OF GROWTH

BY MIONA SHORT

I came to YOUmedia as a shy artist who wanted to perfect my craft. Many of the best poets I know first made a name for themselves at the Wednesday open mics. I was in awe of the supportive community that was facilitated through shared fist raising and the "power to the people" moniker. At YOUmedia, I found my niche where I could grow as a writer and be inspired by others who also desired to evolve in their respective art forms.

My first visit was on a Wednesday afternoon in the summer of 2011. I chose a chair directly right of center. When I sat down, I immediately connected with the DJ's (later my teammate Marcus Prince) choice of song, Que Sera by trip hop artist Wax Tailor. From then on, for a reason that I still do not understand completely, I knew that I had entered a place where I would spread my wings and take flight.

I joined the YOUmedia poetry team in November 2011, and it made a complete difference in my life. For the first time, I had been exposed to a variety of poets; I was challenged to write in many forms to which I would not have otherwise been exposed. Most importantly, for the first time I felt that I belonged to a community who had a vested interest in allowing me to push the limits of my talent. My coaches Jen Steele and "Brother" Mike Hawkins played an incomparable role in my development. They gave my teammates and me a perfect, yet delicate, balance between challenging and nurturing. We were never urged to fit some kind of mold. Instead, Jen and Mike were more interested in having us create our own unique and powerful voices. YOUmedia has a reputation for developing artists who later become integral to Chicago's ever-growing poetry scene. I attribute that reputation to our dedicated mentors, as well as artists who desire to incite positive change in our community and in our world at large.

In November 2012, I was awarded a full-tuition scholarship to the University of Wisconsin-Madison in conjunction with admittance into the highly competitive First Wave Hip Hop and Urban Arts Learning Community. Only fifteen students are selected each year to be part of this wonderful program that will further allow me to hone my craft and work under the geniuses of many established artists. I fully acknowledge that without YOUmedia this dream would have had a significantly lesser chance of being realized. YOUmedia is the entity that catapulted me to the next level of my growth and evolution as a poet and as a person. I am appreciative not only to those involved in YOUmedia's poetry team, but to everyone on the staff who has fostered a sense of community so that I and other youth are able to come to a place where people rejoice in our accomplishments and help us better ourselves through art.

ONWARD

YOUmedia was founded on the belief that educators can do much more to leverage the potential of new media to support connected learning for young people who might not otherwise have these opportunities or supports in their homes, schools, or communities. In a space like YOUmedia, young people are exposed to a wide variety of experiences and opportunities. They are able to see their peers engaging in interesting projects, producing good work, and successfully pursuing their interests. These interactions help teens develop insight into their potential for achievement, especially if they take advantage of the mentor, peer, and technological resources available in the space. From a broader societal perspective, the goal of YOUmedia is to mitigate the inequity in access to digital literacy and, more generally, to connected, socially supported, interest-driven learning. The program does so by providing a model for how local educational and cultural institutions can serve as a support system to guide non-dominant youth toward connected learning experiences. YOUmedia serves all youth who walk through its doors, but at the model's core is a principle of equity and a commitment to seeing new media networks provide broadened access to enriched learning. An open-door policy in a context that values the culture and identities of non-dominant youth means an environment of healthy diversity that elevates all young people and the adults who serve them.

In 2013, as YOUmedia Chicago enters its fourth year of operation, it continues to be a living laboratory for how to build environments that bring together teens, adults, and learning institutions in ways that build valuable relationships, shared interests, and expanded opportunity. As it gets adapted and adopted in more varied settings, the YOUmedia design model continues to co-evolve in tandem with ongoing research and the refinement of the principles of connected learning. This report represents a collaboration with designers, researchers, youth, and the staff involved in YOUmedia Chicago for purposes of reflecting together on lessons learned and co-developing our own sense of shared purpose and interests. As the first YOUmedia site, YOUmedia Chicago has been both blessed by resources and attention, as well as challenged in its role as an innovator. In order for the lessons from YOUmedia Chicago to have broader relevance, it will be critical for the model to be tested and adapted in sites that have a different history, serve diverse populations, and have varied resources and infrastructure. It seems appropriate to end not with a conclusion, but with an invitation for our readers and collaborators to contribute to this ongoing effort.

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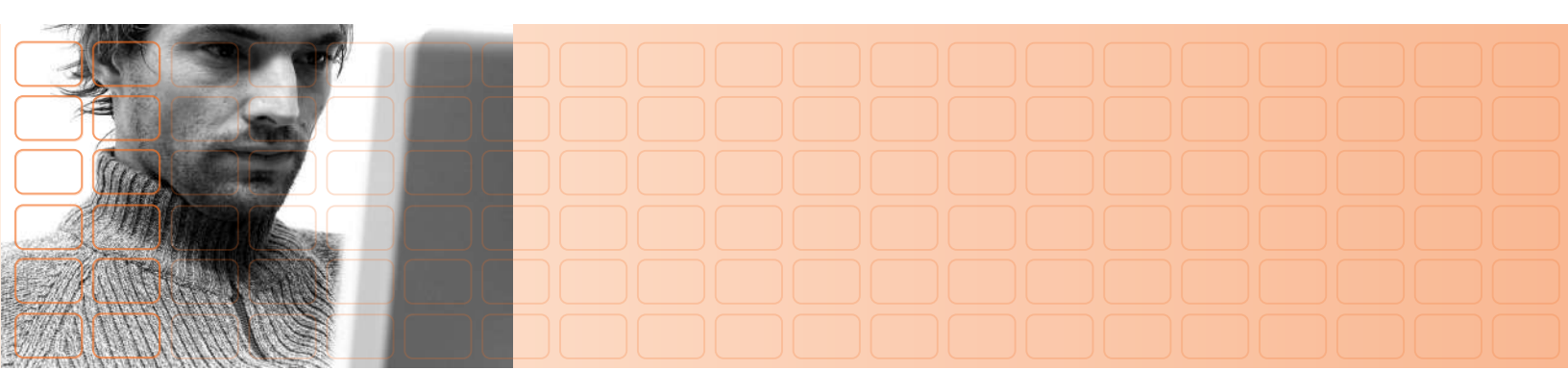
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Connected Learning

PROGRAM GUIDE - YOUmedia Chicago

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OVERVIEW

Contents

Acknowledgements

We hope this YOUmedia Chicago Edition of the Connected Learning Program Guide will be the first of many such attempts to illustrate how connected learning is being implemented in diverse educational settings. These particular signature programs are presented as examples of work that grew out of local needs and opportunities in YOUmedia Chicago, but are not intended as a prescription for other learning labs. We hope you will be compelled to share your own programs through a future iteration of this guide adapted to your own efforts to put connected learning into practice.

Sam Dyson
Director, Hive Chicago Learning Network, formerly Program Director for Learning Labs

Introduction

What Is Connected Learning?

Today young people have the world at their fingertips in ways that were unimaginable just a generation ago. World-renowned lectures, a symphony of voices and opinions, peer-to-peer learning opportunities are all a click away. Through digital media, youth today also have countless, and open, opportunities to share, create, and expand their horizons. They are not relegated to a role of passive consumer, but instead are active participants, makers, and doers.

At the same time, learning opportunities beyond school abound, whether they be programs in museums or libraries, youth groups or sports teams, or after-school programs or "makeshops" where kids can learn to make things and discover how things work.

In many ways, kids' out-of-school time is just as important as their in-school time for learning, and it matters tremendously for learning inside school. Yet too often, these opportunities are piecemeal and not coordinated across programs. Parents and kids must work hard to patch together related learning opportunities. And little of the learning that takes place is connected directly back to the classroom. The question is, how can you be more active about linking those two together?

Connected learning offers a framework for how to better integrate learning that happens in other spheres of kids' lives—and particularly online—with what they learn in the classroom.

It begins where kids are. It brings together three spheres in young people's lives that are often disconnected: peer culture, interests, and academic content. Connected learning is realized when a young person is able to pursue a personal interest or passion with the support of friends and caring adults, and is in turn able to link this learning and interest to academic achievement, career success, or civic engagement.

This model is based on evidence that the most resilient, adaptive, and effective learning involves individual interest, as well as social supports and recognition. In other words, it recognizes that youth-driven interests and social engagement are sparks to learning and should be promoted and encouraged, supported by adults and peers, and connected back to the classroom and other realms of learning.

Program Guide Roadmap

The five program descriptions that follow—Lyricist Loft; One Book, One Chicago; Library of Games; YouLit Magazine; and YOUmedia Records—are illustrations of connected learning in action. Each program is built around its core principles, learning that is:

- » **interest driven**
- » **peer supported**
- » **academically oriented**
- » **production centered**
- » **networked**
- » **shared purpose**

This guide is meant to be illustrative only. It is not a prescription for how to create "connected learning programs." It is meant to be a starting point for organizations to work from as they create their own programming—or better yet, as teens create their own programming. As each program reveals, youth voice was critical to its success. In fact, several of the programs reconfigured themselves after teens took the topic and made it their own. And if there's one message that the YOUmedia mentors have learned, it is that programs that are designed and run by teens, with mentors acting as guides, are the most sustainable and valuable.

The five programs were launched at the Chicago YOUmedia, the first YOUmedia in the nation. Each program begins with a description of the context that the mentor was working in, or the programming dilemma that he or she was addressing. It follows with videos of the teens and mentors talking about their experience with the program, or examples of student work (as in the case of One Book, Lyricist Loft, and YOUmedia Records). The remainder of the program guide outlines the nuts and bolts of the program elements, focus, tools used, and other resources.

Lyricist Loft

Context

Lyricist Loft is a weekly open mic platform for teens across the city of Chicago to come together in the YOUmedia space to showcase their art forms, including spoken word, hip-hop, R&B, music production, poetry, video, and dance.

The program began in the summer of 2009, shortly after YOUmedia opened, when teens approached YOUmedia's lead mentor, Brother Mike Hawkins, asking if they could create a performance space similar to a popular spoken word locale in the city. They wanted to recreate the feel of that place and at the same time expand the options for performance for Chicago teens. Given that YOUmedia was relatively new, Hawkins was also working to bring more teens into the space, and an open mic event would likely be a good vehicle for gaining audience.

Hawkins was a perfect source, having developed a popular weekly jam in his West Loop loft that brought art, poetry, and music together in new and creative ways. Hawkins modeled YOUmedia on that experience with student input. The performances all blend a variety of media and expression.

Although the teens were excited about the prospects, their first hurdle was getting the word out. The first event attracted only 25 students, and the teens decided they needed to use social media more effectively to create a buzz. They tweeted and advertised on Facebook, shared pictures on Flickr of the various Lyricist Loft events, and took ownership of the program. Today, the program has one of the largest attendance rates of any weekly program in the Chicago Public Library system, averaging between 75 and 100 young people.

Lyricist Loft provides a space where teens can develop and showcase their talents and offers an opportunity for teens to gain skills on a variety of digital media, from social media to music equipment to graphic design. Students have honed their writing skills and learned to develop a particular message through performing. They have also learned how those two elements work together. Lyricist Loft also provides students a platform for collaboration. Teens assume different roles, and the roles must all mesh together for the event to come off without a hitch. Roles include a host, a DJ, a videographer, and a team in charge of outreach. They also learn how to keep the performances within their parameters and aligned with house rules, such as no profanity. Furthermore, it's a space where kids can safely fail and use that experience as a learning opportunity. The audience encourages students to continue working on their art form. And if they "mess up," there is always next week. The performance aspect of the event honors the courage to try, the bravery to persist and get better, and the sheer will to move toward mastery of skills.

Connected Learning Principles

- » Interest-powered
- » Openly networked
- » Peer-supported
- » Equity
- » Social connections
- » Full participation

Videos

https://vimeo.com/13995407

Mentor Brother Mike Hawkins discusses how Lyricist Loft came to be, and teens talk about their experience learning to use other forms of digital media to supplement the spoken word. The program has become a huge draw as the teens have made it their own. They have also expanded their view of poetry and creativity.

As one teen said, "I just know that I started out doing poetry and I never actually thought it would turn into something bigger and that I'd be learning how to do music production so I could use my words over the beats."

Program Details

Lyricist Loft at its core is a community showcase space for teens. It is an open mic performance that features various forms of expression, from spoken word to poetry, music, dance, and film. Ideally these works are produced by YOUmedia students, while at the same time providing a platform for students outside of the program to share and connect with the space, their peers, and the event itself.

The program is ideally run by the teens. Mentors can set the guidelines in the beginning of the set. However, the roles connected to the event should be owned by the teens themselves.

Tools Used

Key tools and technical elements include:

- » **Microphone(s)**
- » **Audio/Visual Equipment:** speakers, amplifier, Digital DJ (deck or software), turntable (vinyl and/or Serato Scratch Live); camera (photo/video for documenting): Rebel T3i, Canon 7D
- » **Musical Equipment:** keyboards, MPC (Akai or Korg), The Maschine (native instruments)

Mentor Roles

The mentor sets guidelines.

Student Roles

Teens can engage in many roles connected to the Lyricist Loft, including:

- » **Host(s):** Greet guests, conduct the flow of the night
- » **Host of "Lyricist Loft TV":** (acts as personality for online audience, interview features/guests)
- » **DJ:** Creates the mood for the event, and creates effective transitions between acts
- » **House Musician/Band**
- » **Photographer:** Shoots and archives photos for the event
- » **Videographer/Video Team:** Shoots, archives, and edits parts or entirety of the event
- » **Social Media Team:** Maintains connection with artists, audience, and the larger community through Hive, Facebook, and Twitter
- » **Blogger**
- » **Audio Producer:** Radio/iTunes curator
- » **Graphic Designer:** Creates flyers and promotional material for event

Students can "level up" their skills and contributions in a variety of ways. Students can work to become a featured act. Becoming a feature at Lyricist Loft is a badge of honor to the students. Features are selected by the mentor, by Lyricist Loft staff, or based on audience response (over time). Students can also level up by holding various staff positions. Becoming part of the staff has traditionally been based on proven skill on the part of the student and/or mentor suggestion. For example, hosts are identified by the Spoken Word mentor, DJs are identified by Music and/or Radio mentors, and TV staff (videographer, host, and editors) are selected by the Video mentor.

Curriculum Scope and Sequence

Program Content and Schedule

Lyricist Loft is a vehicle for performance. It serves both as an internal platform for YOUmedia students to showcase their work and an external platform and gateway for students of the larger community to contribute and showcase their works.

Lyricist Loft as a performance space serves as a bridge to these audiences to become aware of one another, and to find in the mutuality of interest a space to learn, critique, and collaborate toward a collective goal of (implicit and many cases explicit) high standards of performance, from technique to form and methods of delivery.

The opportunity to perform gives space for students to voice their ideas, but it also gives them a place to fail, and in that same space the critique and support to try again. The performance aspect of the event honors the courage to try, the bravery to persist and get better, and honors the sheer will to move toward mastery of skills.

Offline and Online Tools for Creating and Sharing Digital Products

Lyricist Loft is a showcase space for students to present final works, or works in progress. There are times where students will collaborate on the spot, or freestyle, virtually creating new material in the moment.

Promotional materials include photos, flyers, and video that promote the upcoming performances andpromote them after the event is over.

The students use the following tools to share their work and publicize the events:

» **The HIVE Learning Network (Chicago)** provides a space to promote the event to the entire HIVE community. It also houses an online group for poets who want to share and get feedback on their writing.

» **Facebook** is primarily a promotion tool for the event. It has become a virtual word of mouth vehicle for the event. We create weekly e-vites, and post the flyer out for distribution. The flyer often becomes not only the features profile picture, but many others adopt the flyer as their profile event to show support and further promote. Students also post pictures and video that also act as informal forms of our viral marketing. Pictures that Lyricist Loft posts from events are tagged by participants and entered into their photo archives.

» **Twitter** is used to accent the promotion. We normally push out tweets when the flyer is launched and on the day of the event with the hash tag #LyricistLoft.

» **Tumblr:** This site is used to document, archive, and continue to promote the Lyricist Loft movement. We also allow contributions from the Lyricist Loft community to share their experience as well.

The students also blog about the process and the event. Digital archives of Lyricist Loft feature:

» **Event reflections**
» **Interviews with "features"** (students who have displayed, either in a workshop or on the stage, a high level of skill and who get 30 minutes on stage to showcase their work of choice)
» **Photos**
» **Videos**
» **Articles on poets, events, tools**

Target Audience

Typical participant. Lyricist Loft tends to bring in a very diverse audience. Our main racial makeup consists of black, white, and Latino students. Typically, students who are engaged in Lyricist Loft are drawn to poetry and hip-hop culture, and include artists, poets, rappers, beat makers, singers, and designers. Many of the students tend to be tastemakers and trendsetters in their social groups, both in school and online.

Lyricist Loft also seems to create a genuine collaborative spirit, as many students claim various artists' crews (i.e., SaveMoney, Huey Game, Pivot, CommonWealth, and SaveChicago). It is interesting to note that the crews are not in a direct competition (not to suggest there is no natural competition element), but there seems to be a true sense of support for one another. There is a shared purpose of success.

Lyricist Loft participants tend to be regulars; we see a high return rate of students who experience the space. The program has one of the largest attendance rates of any weekly program in the Chicago Public Library system, averaging between 75 and 100 young people.

Age range. 16-18 years of age.

Skill level. Lyricist Loft performers range from novice to expert.

We encourage students to test their craft, and to practice to improve. And by having seasoned performers and professionals showcase for the students, levels begin to emerge and become very clear. Students who have displayed a high level of skill in writing or performing are often invited to be featured performers, where they are featured in a staff-designed flyer and get 30 minutes of stage time to showcase their work. Features are recorded and interviewed by the video team (for archiving and artists' use).

We also make clear the pathways in which students can develop their craft through YOUmedia workshop offerings (i.e., iRemix Spoken Word, Music Production) or external performance opportunities (i.e., Louder than a Bomb).

HOMAGO and How "Leveling Up" Is Facilitated
(HOMAGO is Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out)

Lyricist Loft can exist across the HOMAGO model, based on where a participant's disposition lies:

» **Performers and spectators:** Hang Out by engaging in the event and with their peers
» **Performers:** Some performers Mess Around by freestyling and/or experimenting with new ways of delivering their piece.
» **Performers and features:** Many of the performers and definitely the features are Geeked Out into their practice. Lyricist Loft gives them the platform to showcase and/or test their skills.

Multimedia Resources

» **Event Overview** (http://vimeo.com/13995407)
» **Student Feature Snippet** (http://vimeo.com/14463276)
» **Sample Promotion Video** (http://vimeo.com/25092862)
» **Sample Promotion Flyers** (http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=349530466558&v=photos&ref=ts)
» **Facebook Group** (http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=349530466558)
» **Group on iRemix** (http://chicago.iremix.me/community/groups/iremix-spoken-word/about)
» **Tumblr** (http://lyricistloft.tumblr.com/)

One Book, One Chicago

Context

One Book, One Chicago runs every fall and spring in partnership with the Chicago Public Library's adult programming department. The Chicago Public Library's One Book, One Chicago program was developed by the city to "engage and enlighten our residents, foster a sense of community and create a culture of reading in our city." Chicagoans jointly read a chosen book and participate in programming and events

related to the content and themes of the book. YOUmedia participates in One Book by asking students to create a variety of digital artifacts inspired by and related to the book. YOUmedia staff saw a natural fit with the citywide program—given the Library's central role—and its focus on digital storytelling. It also allowed an easy entry point to digital media for library staff.

Although a handful of teens would participate each month in the library-led discussions of the book, YOUmedia mentor Jennifer Steele wanted to engage teens with each book in new ways. Therefore, she encouraged teens to interpret the book through different media, for example, short, student-made films, musical scores, new cover designs, spoken word interpretations, poetry, and other multimedia options. The program is offered twice each year, in the spring and the fall. Over the course of the book project, the students learn the basics of literary interpretation, as well as a solid set of digital media skills, including graphic design, video and music production, and photography. They work together collaboratively on projects and frequently improve their writing skills.

The teens have thus far created an instrumental score based on Toni Morrison's A Mercy and created audio narratives and spoken word performances in which they reimagined dialogue between characters in the novel. Watch the video at http://spotlight.macfound.org/studentspeak/entry/open-the-door-to-what-is-possible-reading-toni-morrison-inspires-new-media/, and their performance for the Chicago Public Library event can be seen at http://spotlight.macfound.org/studentspeak/entry/we-build-ourselves-up-together-chicago-teens-adapt-and-remix/.

They created short video remakes (http://spotlight.macfound.org/studentspeak/entry/changing-the-nature-of-storytelling-chicago-students-remix-neil-gaimans-nev/) of Neil Gaiman's Neverwhere, which they showcased for Gaiman when he visited YOUmedia (watch the video at http://spotlight.macfound.org/student-speak/entry/changing-the-nature-of-storytelling-chicago-students-remix-neil-gaimans-nev/).

For the "heavier" read of Carl Smith's The Plan of Chicago: Daniel Burnham and the Remaking of the American City (celebrating the centennial of that plan), the teens were sent on a modern-day scavenger hunt using mobile phones and geocaching. As they chased history clues around the city, they learned about Burnham and how his plan affected the city they call home. They also interviewed community artists, transformed empty lots into virtual gardens, and laid down tracks of spoken word and music in a project to update Burnham's original urban plan (watch a video of this project at http://spotlight.macfound.org/featured-stories/entry/finding-daniel-burnham-finding-community)

The One Book, One Chicago program, says Steele, underscores what it means to be a library patron and the value and importance of the library to their lives and their city.

Connected Learning Principles:

» **Interest-powered**
» **Academically oriented**
» **Peer-supported**
» **Production-centered**
» **Openly networked**

Videos

The videos feature YOUmedia student projects for *Neverwhere, A Mercy,* and *The Plan of Chicag*
Neverwhere: http://vimeo.com/23481043   *A Mercy*: http://vimeo.com/16226919

StudentSpeak Webisode 25

StudentSpeak Webisode 16

A Mercy: http://vimeo.com/15913863

StudentSpeak Webisode 15
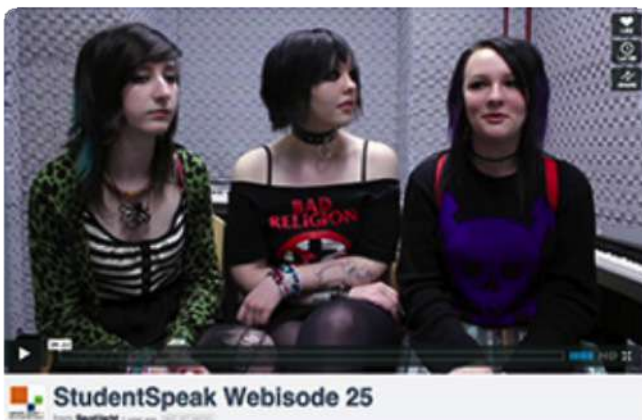
Program Details

The structure of One Book differs from book to book. The House on Mango Street and A Mercy were structured around specific workshops for after-school students with support of the iRemix platform. The Plan of Chicago, Brooklyn, A Mercy, and Neverwhere were presented as school projects for classrooms. This involved participation both in the physical space of YOUmedia and on the iRemix network. For The Adventures of Augie March, mentors incorporated themes from the book into the workshop's curriculum with support in the physical and online spaces.

Students selected for the project (from workshops) are expected to read the book, participate in book discussions related to the title, identify themes, and produce pieces in time for the One Book showcase based on those themes. These students are usually technically proficient and are at varying levels of skill in terms of producing themed and focused products. These students usually have participated in at least one workshop, and many One Book participants are repeat students.

To create their final product, students first read the selected title and unpack the themes and issues presented in the book. The students then write peer-reviewed proposals. Students then go through a cycle of drafting, receiving mentor and peer feedback until the work is ready for showcasing. Students use group spaces in iRemix to receive feedback from peers and mentors. Students can also use the forums as an online book discussion space to allow them a virtual outlet to sift through themes and brainstorm project ideas.

The final project is featured in a showcase performance for their YOUmedia peers or through author events. Students have had the opportunity to show their work directly to the author of the One Book titles. Student work is also featured in YouLit magazine and on YOUmedia Tumblr blogs, allowing students' performed work to reach beyond the YOUmedia audience.

Mentor Roles

All mentors participate in the program either by teaching workshops or weaving the themes into their current workshops. Junior mentors and interns are all asked to read the book and help plan and run One Book projects and assist with book discussions. They are also asked to help promote the current title and recruit their peers.

Student Roles

Students are all treated as lead artists on projects. They are challenged to interpret the book in the medium of their choice, and as artists, they are given the freedom to determine the nature of the medium and project. Students are also given the opportunity to collaborate with their peers on projects. Students can choose their roles within these collaborations. For example, a student might write poetry about the book's title; another student will record the piece; and another student will add music to the piece (thus playing the roles of poet, studio engineer/producer, and soundtrack artist).

Curriculum Scope and Sequence

Program Content and Schedule

One Book allows students who have worked in skill-based workshops to practice these skills in a different context. One Book is less about skill acquisition and more about application of those skills. Students can practice within the One Book-specific workshops by developing iterations of their pieces for the final showcase. Critique from external sources can occur during and after showcase performances. Critique also occurs in the comment section on the Tumblr blog (although it is also monitored by a mentor). In these cases, the critique is of finished pieces and not earlier iterations.

A variety of media is produced including:

- » Songs
- » Graphic design
- » Podcasts
- » YouLit themed issues
- » Poetry
- » Video
- » Comics
- » Music scores
- » Photography
- » Radio
- » Prose/stories

To hold students accountable they must read the title and meet work deadlines in order to be part of the showcase. One Book has a large platform unlike other programs. The chance to perform in a larger context (either as a Lyricist Loft feature, as a YouLit Magazine feature, or in public venues or in front of the One Book author) is an incentive to complete work on time. If students fail to meet deadlines, they lose the opportunity to be part of the showcase or author event.

The One Book, One Chicago program runs in the spring and fall. To date, it has focused on the following books:

- » Spring 2009: *The House on Mango Street,* by Sandra Cisneros
- » Fall 2009: *The Plan of Chicago,* by Carl Smith
- » Spring 2010: *Brooklyn,* by Colm Tóibîn
- » Fall 2010: *A Mercy,* by Toni Morrison
- » Spring 2011: *Neverwhere,* by Neil Gaiman
- » Fall 2011: *The Adventures of Augie March,* by Saul Bellow
- » Spring 2012: *Gold Boy,* Emerald Girl, by Yiyun Li
- » Fall 2012: *The Book Thief,* by Markus Zusak

Offline and Online Tools for Creating and Sharing Digital Products

Students use group spaces in iRemix to draft their work and receive feedback from peers and mentors. Students can also use the forums as an online book discussion space to allow them a virtual outlet to sift through themes and brainstorm project ideas.

The students use Tumblr and Issuu to showcase their work and share exemplary pieces with an outside audience. Below are some of the Tumblr and Issuu sites created for the project. YouLit Magazine is also a potential forum.

Connected Learning PROGRAM GUIDE

Target Audience

Typical participant. Because students from schools across the city and homeschoolers participate in the citywide One Book program, students who participate at YOUmedia come from a variety of backgrounds and skill levels requiring programming and curriculum to be simplified and broadened.

In addition, students in specific One Book–themed workshops are hand-selected to participate in the project.

Age range. 14-18

Skill level. Students in the after-school space who participate are required to have previously displayed skills in their media before joining. Students have all the resources available in YOUmedia to "level up" to the One Book level. They can take skill-building workshops, work one-on-one with mentors, and complete online self-paced activities.

Core Competencies Gained

Students earn a "project completion" badge (with individual badges for each selection), a "book discussion" badge, and a "collaboration" badge.

Multimedia Resources

- » *A Mercy* photo book (http://tumblr.com/Z_Bn4y1Qe1fq)

- » *A Mercy* Issuu book (http://issuu.com/youmediachicago/docs)

- » *Neverwhere* (don't miss the "archive") (http://neverwherechicago.tumblr.com/post/3961537104/
what-if-there-was-a-beast-of-chicago-like-the)

- » Issue #2 of YouLit Magazine (http://issuu.com/youmediachicago/docs/youlit_issue__2__issuu_)

- » *A Mercy* mixtape (http://www.reverbnation.com/amercymixtape)

Library of Games

Context

Library of Games engages a small group of teens at YOUmedia Chicago in the art of criticism. The studentsmeet weekly to produce 45–to–60-minute podcast critiques of select video games. Library of Games was designed and is led by Taylor Bayless, a librarian at the Harold Washington Library in Chicago and YOUmedia mentor. Bayless guides the teens as they select videos to critique, and she helps them to think more deeply about the elements of good video game design and play. She also introduces them to audio production and blogging, as well as working with them to improve their writing and performance skills. The students record the podcasts using an Apple laptop and two USB microphones.

The program has evolved since Bayless originally conceived it. When YOUmedia first opened, students either were often unaware of the programs offered or were not interested in the offerings, which at the time were music and spoken word. Other teens would "hang out" (one of the stages of HOMAGO[1]) and play video games but wouldn't move, with the help of mentors, to the next learning stage of "messing around."

Bayless thought that engaging teens around video games might encourage them to become more in-volved. Given Bayless's background in video games, she created a workshop in which students would play a video game and then collectively write a review. They would each be assigned an element of the game and share their reactions to these elements on a blog. The initial meeting was a success. The ten teens who participated were excited and engaged in the discussion of games. However, the subsequent week, Bayless asked the teens to write their reactions on the blog. The majority dropped out. The students were already writing all day in school, and they didn't want to do more after school. They also felt that writing was too solitary. Bayless quickly realized that in a collaborative and social space such as YOUmedia, a writing or blogging workshop can be difficult to get off the ground.

The solution: ask the teens to talk about video games rather than write about them. The shift worked. The program has a steady group of podcasters who over the years have expanded not only their knowl-edge of video games but also their critical thinking and public speaking skills.

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[1] *HOMAGO is "hanging out, messing around, and geeking out"—the three stages of learning that happen in YOUmedia sites and in other online and digital realms, according to research by University of California, Irvine, scholar Mimi Ito. See Ito et al., Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out: Kids Living and Learning with New Media (MIT, 2010).

The main goal, according to Bayless, is to get the teens to think critically and to learn to express their ideas about video games. Teens, she believes, are too rarely asked to think critically about the things that they like. In focusing on teens' own interests (in this case video games), Bayless is following a key tenet of connected learning: self-directed learning. And in altering the program from her original vision, she is following a key tenet of YOUmedia: student voice. The program's shift was so effective that the teens, several months later, asked Bayless if they could create a blog. They now regularly post on the blog, writing where they once saw no need.

The teens have improved their public speaking and presentation skills, and they've learned how to work as part of a team, delegate various duties, share responsibility, and assume leadership roles. Furthermore, they have learned how to blog, how to manage comments in a responsible way, and how to share content on social networks. They have also gained a basic understanding of HTML and web publishing, learned about basic audio production (how to edit and set up the podcast), and, in the end, improved their writing skills.

Connected Learning Principles

- » **Interest-powered**
- » **Peer-supported**
- » **Production-centered**
- » **Shared purpose**
- » **Openly networked**
- » **Full participation**

Video

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gP86EHw-5Qg

Lead mentor Taylor Bayless and student gamer Kallif Ammen talk about how Library of Games has evolved as a program, led by the teens. "They're the ones who put the whole thing together and define what it is," says Bayless. Bayless also talks about how her role as mentor has changed, and what success looks like to them both.

Program Details

Library of Games (LoG) consists of a weekly student-recorded podcast with three segments: "news conference," and 2 "personal choices." Students also create show notes and a blog post, with accompanying images.

The planning and recording of the podcast allows students to practice their criticism of video games in a safe and supportive environment. When students begin in the podcast, they are not required to plan segments or features—they can at first sit in on the recording without speaking and then gradually join the conversation, as they feel comfortable.

Each week, the team chooses a themed category, and each teen selects two games that are personal choices for that category. Each student offers a rationale, argument, or anecdote to support his/her choices. This allows students who may have a low level of critical understanding to reflect on previous gaming experiences that are personally meaningful. Mentors can help introduce games that students might not be familiar with.

The second segment, News Conference, allows students to take on a "producing" role. Each student is required to read gaming blogs and magazines during the week and pick one story that he/she feels has enough content for a 30-minute discussion. They then are asked to write 4 or 5 discussion questions that will guide the podcast discussion. This allows the student to "practice" critical reading of gaming news and stay connected to the topic.

A typical LoG podcast begins three to four days before the episode is recorded. The mentor shares a Google Docs file with the students in the program with a bare outline of the episode content. The students take the next few days to fill out the Google document with content, including feature notes, news items, and selections for the "personal choice" segment. Each student should come to the podcast having read the entire document, including the articles other students have provided links for. The students assist the mentor in setting up the recording equipment and studio space. This involves moving chairs, arranging microphones, and setting up the GarageBand recording.

Before recording starts, the mentor or a youth volunteer takes the group through a quick run-through of the episode. This includes going over the order of segments, who is leading each segment, and any clarifying questions about the show content. The mentor then leads the group through a sound check, and recording begins. If the mentor isn't present, the students can go through all these steps on their own.

Students record the episode with breaks in between segments. The mentor and another student monitor the recording. When the recording is finished, a student saves the episode on the LoG hard drives, takes it to edit, and posts the episode online on his/her own. The editor duties rotate based on a predetermined calendar made at the beginning of the recording season.

In an ideal podcast, the episode should flow smoothly and every student should be interested in the topics discussed and should have something to add to the conversation. The best podcasts are those in which all students are passionate and opinionated about the topic while respecting their fellow contributors. The mentor can usually tell when this is happening when the conversation continues during the break.

Beyond the podcast, students also maintain a blog, with four sections (more detail below): editorials, reviews, news, and features.

Tools Used

Key tools used in production include:

- » **Google Docs:** Students use Google Docs for planning purposes and to share working documents like the game review rating criteria and podcast feature schedule. They also use Google Docs to write articles for the blog.
- » **Wordpress:** They also use the Wordpress dashboard (back-end) for saving and writing drafts, audio drafts, and media files.
- » **Twitter and Facebook:** LoG also has its own Twitter and Facebook page for marketing purposes. After posting the recording to SoundCloud, iTunes, and libraryofgames.org, the students tweet about the episode using the LoG, YOUmedia, and personal accounts.
- » **Recording tools:** The podcast is recorded and edited with GarageBand using two USB microphones. Podcasts are made available to the public using SoundCloud, a free audio hosting site. SoundCloud then pushes the audio content to the iTunes Store automatically. Students embed the SoundCloud podcast upload in any blog posts as well. This allows the public to find the podcast in three places: libraryofgames.org, the iTunes Store, and SoundCloud.
- » **Graphic Design:** Images that accompany blog posts are designed in Photoshop and Illustrator.

Mentors' Roles

Only one mentor is necessary to run LoG. However, he or she should be genuinely knowledgeable and passionate about video games and criticism. The mentor who runs LoG is not necessarily a video game designer but someone who cares and is knowledgeable about the player experience, gaming journalism, and the importance of media criticism.

The LoG mentor develops the curriculum, gives feedback, and communicates with the students. The mentor functions as the "Manager of Library of Games," which means that he or she supervises the student work and makes logistical arrangements for the group (e.g., finds studio time, creates documents and frameworks). The mentor should also participate in the podcast, but should not plan features or individual segments. The mentor instead should focus on guiding conversation to areas the students may have overlooked or function as devil's advocate in debates. To model skills the mentor should write articles and post on the LoG blog several times during a season.

The mentor should have some knowledge of recording techniques. However, the focus of LoG is not on how to record a podcast but rather on how to critique and understand the world of video games. Therefore, the skills in media criticism and gaming knowledge are much more important than recording skills.

Student Roles

The individual roles within LoG are:

- » **Podcast contributor:** Contributes to the planning document and speaks during the podcast.
- » **Podcast host:** Introduces the show and manages the flow of content during the show.
- » **Feature producer:** Develops the content and guiding questions for a specific podcast feature.
- » **Podcast editor:** Edits the podcast recording, writes the show notes, and posts the podcast on the blog.
- » **Podcast audio producer:** Sets up the audio recording and monitors audio levels throughout the recording.

- » **Web developer:** Designs the LoG blog and adds new blog features.
- » **Webmaster:** Manages web content, makes simple updates to the site.
- » **Art director:** Creates logos, feature banners, and other promotional materials.
- » **Social media manager:** Manages Twitter and Facebook accounts.
- » **Writer:** Writes game reviews, editorials, and news items for the blog.
- » **Senior writer:** Edits others' pieces and writes an editorial column.

All students are expected to take on the role of podcast contributor, which means simply participating in the planning and speaking during the podcast. This allows the main focus to be critical thinking about video games; that is, it is the only activity in which every member of the group participates.

Students volunteer for all other roles. Roles are not assigned to students unless absolutely necessary in order for the media to be produced. This allows each student to feel comfortable with and have a genuine interest in his or her role. Students can also fill multiple roles.

To help students experience roles outside of their chosen fields, mentors assign them backup roles. For example, if the podcast host is sick, one of the other students is designated as the backup host. If the podcast editor is too busy to edit the podcast, he or she can ask the backup for help.

All students are part of the editorial board and participate in meetings that determine the overall direction of LoG. The group also collectively plans special events like game tournaments and National Gaming Day.

Curriculum Scope and Sequence

Program Content and Schedule

Students meet once a week to record the podcast in the YOUmedia studio. The planning for this podcast occurs online: students use a Google Docs file to plan features, news items, and other content for the podcast. Students also meet in person at the beginning, middle, and end of each season (three seasons per year) to plan feature schedules, make blogging schedules, consider format changes, and plan special events.

Offline and Online Tools for Creating and Sharing Digital Products

Blogging. The following are different types of blogs written for the LoG site.

- » **Editorials** (http://libraryofgames.org/category/editorial/)
- » **Reviews:** (http://libraryofgames.org/into-the-sunset-red-dead-redemption-review/) An example includes "Into the Sunset: Red Dead Redemption Review"
- » **News:** (http://libraryofgames.org/category/news/)
  An example includes "A Message from Library of Games"
- » **Features:** (http://libraryofgames.org/category/featured/) An example of a feature is a recent live podcast
- » **Podcast post:** (http://libraryofgames.org/portfolio-post/season-8-episode-2-no-fighting/)
  An example of a recent podcast is "No Fighting"

The website itself is also a youth-created artifact. Students maintain and helped design the site.

Twitter. Twitter is the main social network used to gather and disseminate information across participants. The mentor can send updates and reminders about the program as well as easily share and retweet relevant articles. Students also use Twitter to share articles among the group and with the mentor. Many podcast segments have been discovered, worked on, and finalized over Twitter. Twitter can also be used to

engage outside participants in discussion. For example, a student wrote a piece about the possibility of a 9/11 video games, which prompted a Twitter debate between the mentor, LoG students, and outside Twitter followers that was over 100 tweets long. This conversation allowed for immediate feedback and debate even before the topic was discussed on the podcast.

Tools and Practices to Support Reflection

All written work goes through an iteration process. Students verbally pitch a blog idea to the group. The student receives feedback and advice. The student then posts a first draft on the back end of the LoG website. Both peers and mentors read these drafts, and this feedback is taken into consideration before a student writes the next draft. The iteration process usually involves one or two drafts.

Once the written piece is finalized and posted on the LoG blog, it is then open for critique from external sources through the comments section on the blog. The mentor monitors the comment section for "flame" or "troll" type posts; however, sometimes students do encounter critiques that are not always constructive because of the broad nature of Internet audiences. These instances can actually lead to positive teaching moments about the tone and content of Internet comment threads and also how to respond appropriately to harsh or unfair criticism.

Podcasts do not go through an iteration process in terms of reflection on general recording process, content, and format. At the beginning, middle, and end of each season, the group meets to identify strengths and weaknesses in the podcast. From season to season the format of the podcast is changed based on feedback from within the group, from the lead mentor, and from external sources (the podcast audience who can comment on the website, email, Twitter, or Facebook). There is also reflection time during podcast recordings.

During segment breaks, the group takes time to talk through what worked or didn't work during podcast recordings. This discussion may include whether or not the subject matter was deep enough to warrant a segment, if the feature producer asked the right questions or led the segment appropriately, if the host used creative segues, and if contributors followed recording discussion guidelines and used appropriate hand signals. If the segment and discussion went, well this is also a moment for students to come up with ideas for future segments and to reflect on tangential and stray thoughts from the conversation that can then be topics for future podcasts.

Community Rules

Library of Games is run as a democracy, and all major decisions go to a vote allowing all voices to be heard. Because the podcast is an entirely collaborative process, teamwork is a highly emphasized soft skill. In order to improve teamwork, the mentor organizes group-building events with the students including field trips to demo new gaming equipment and group dinners after major episodes (E3, LoG Awards, season finales).

Physical Space

The podcast is recorded in the YOUmedia studio. Planning meetings are held throughout the YOUmedia space but mostly in the "Messing Around" area.

Target Audience

Typical participant. Youth in LoG all demonstrate a heavy interest in video games before joining the group. They are all self-identified "gamers," but they may not want to actively become professionals in the gaming industry. The current students in LoG believe that video games are not taken seriously by the adults in their

lives and want to prove that video games can be art.

Because of the studio size, the podcast group is limited to seven people. When there is an opening in the group, anyone can join so long as he or she can commit to the weekly recording time. If a student cannot join the main podcast group, he or she can also write for the blog and record audio game reviews.

Age range. 14-18 years of age

Skill level. Students need to be able to think critically about video games and be willing to play new or different games. This involves expanding critical vocabulary and a willingness to experience games in new ways. Students who are only interested in games because they get to shoot things and blow stuff up are not ready for Library of Games. Students who are willing to approach games as an art form are ready for the program.

Students also need to know about the history of video games and be able to identify major gaming titles, studios, and trends. Much of this knowledge can be gained as a participant in the podcast, but students can also hone their skills in related programs like Awesome Party Boat of Games (a discussion group based on indie gaming) and the library's Book Discussion groups (i.e., critical thinking, vocabulary).

HOMAGO and How "Leveling Up" Is Facilitated
(HOMAGO is Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out)

The production of the Library of Games podcast is a Geeking Out activity that involves research, audio production, writing, etc. However, Messing Around and Hanging Out modes of participation also occur. Students in the program tend to start conversations about video games when hanging out in YOUmedia and also try to engage their peers who are not in the program in discussion while playing video games in the space.

The mentor also creates Hanging Out activities for the group as a way of building the social capital of the youth team. Various activities include group dinners, field trips to play game demos, etc.

Core Competencies Gained

Individual skills to be developed and their associated badges include:

- » Reviewer Badge
- » Reporter Badge
- » Graphic Designer Badge
- » Editorial Badge
- » Blogger Badge
- » Audio Editor Badge
- » Audio Producer Badge
- » Host Badge
- » Feature Producer Badge
- » Interviewer Badge
- » Web Designer Badge

Broader skill sets or competencies acquired (and associated badges) include:

- » Promoter Badge
- » Tournament/Event Organizer Badge
- » Collaboration Badge

Research and Evaluation

Success Defined

A successful student would gain higher-level critical thinking skills, would improve critical writing and speaking skills, and would also improve persuasive writing and speaking skills. These skills should not just apply to the realm of video games but should also transfer to academic writing. Students should also be able to function as advocates for gamers and gaming culture while also being critical about media outputs and consumption. Students who go through LoG will ideally never accept a piece of media at face value and will always think critically about purpose and meaning of a media artifact.

Information Collected to Evaluate Success

The lead mentor collects all student work in draft and final status. This includes podcast planning documents, podcasts in rough and edited states, and all drafts of blog posts. Because all work is published on the LoG website, the mentor can easily find all student work and trace progress from early work to more recent work. The lead mentor is also a contributor in all podcast episodes. This allows the mentor to watch student performances firsthand through the entire process of media creation.

How This Information Is Used to Inform New Iterations of the Program

By evaluating student work over a period of time, the mentor can identify where students may need help in use of technical language, critical thinking, and writing. For example, after listening to several podcasts over a season of the program, the mentor can identify if students need more instruction in flow of conversation or if they need more help in laying out arguments. This may lead to small skill-based lessons in meetings before or after the podcast. The mentor may also introduce new topics to the podcast. For example, if students mention in an episode that they are unfamiliar with a certain genre of game, the mentor can assign articles or play sessions based on gaps in student knowledge.

Evaluating student work can lead to podcast format changes, but these decisions should always be made with student input. For example, after reviewing the past two seasons of the podcast, the mentor noticed that the students were doing a very good job of discussing issues around gamer culture but were rarely focusing on in-depth analysis of single games. Rather than forcing a new segment on the group, the mentor asked the students if they were interested in trying their hand at this kind of analysis. Three students volunteered to run the segment and were able to make it their own, naming the segment and choosing the games that would be up for discussion. This made the new iteration of the program far more successful than if the mentor had mandated the change.

Multimedia Resources

» **Library of Games website and blog** (www.libraryofgames.org)
» **A video featuring interviews with LoG members** (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4Fd9gKM2GY &feature=plcp)
» **The websites that LoG emulates:**
  • Kill Screen
  • Unwinnable: Games, Comics & Pulp Culture
  • Joystiq
  • Rock, Paper, Shotgun

YouLit Magazine

Context

YouLit is an online, student-driven literary magazine that comes out three times a year. Each 30- to 80-page issue is composed of poetry, fiction, graphic design, photography, articles, and reviews. The teens act as an editorial committee, soliciting contributions, selecting and editing submissions, and creating and choosing graphics. They also manage the design, production, and distribution of the magazine.

The project was launched after Jennifer Steele, a mentor at YOUmedia, noticed that teens were writing and posting fiction and poems on iRemix, the online social network for YOUmedia. Steele had a background in literary magazines and asked the students if they'd be interested in starting YOUmedia's own online literary magazine. She was seeking a way for the teens to take ownership of a creation or project, and she believed a magazine would be a good opportunity for such ownership. The project would also introduce them to e-publishing and teach the valuable skill of collaboration that is critical to the success of any magazine.

The teens launched the first meeting in late 2010 with the premiere issue completed in January 2011. The program has been successful because it has given the teens the opportunity to showcase their work to a wide audience. The most popular edition received more than 10,000 hits. There are many high school literary magazines, but few that are digitally published have the capacity to publish students' work nationally and to offer a joint showcase of student writing, artwork, and occasionally audio.

Connected Learning Principles

- » **Interest-powered**
- » **Peer-supported**
- » **Openly networked**
- » **Production-centered**
- » **Academically oriented**
- » **Social connection**
- » **Full participation**

Video

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EC6wF7TtEBQ

YOUmedia Library Associate Marcus Lumpkin and student Kali Johnson talk about YouLit Magazine, a teen-led literary arts magazine. The dynamic teen-driven workshop combines writing, graphics, journalism editing, and photography skills to expand their collaboration skills and hands-on production skills. Johnson included his YouLit Magazine work in his admissions portfolio for the Art Institute of Chicago school, and he says it played a major role in his acceptance into the esteemed program. "It was pretty amazing," he says.

Program Details

The ideal YouLit project would function like a magazine production team, taking initiative and pushing the magazine forward. In a typical production cycle of YouLit, students assume all of the various editorial roles including Editor-in-Chief, Genre Editors, Design and Layout Editor, and others. The students work collaboratively and quasi-independently to produce the magazine from beginning to end. Students gather weekly to discuss new submissions, marketing strategies, production updates, cover decisions, editing, responding to contributors, planning editorial pieces and articles, and thinking of ways to expand the capacity of the magazine. The mentor serves as the facilitator of the magazine, helping students stay on task, guiding them through their themes and decisions, and offering advice on how to continue the work.

Tools Used

The magazine is produced using Pages and uploaded to Issuu.com, a free online publishing website. The site houses all YOUmedia Chicago publications, and allows the public to access the magazine.

Teens also use the Hive network to conduct any discussions and post meeting notes and announcements to the community about the publishing and editorial opportunities.

YouLit Magazine also has a Tumblr blog as well, so that the public can learn about the magazine. It also provides submission guidelines for students who want to contribute content.

Mentors' Roles

The mentor serves as the "managing editor" of the magazine, assuming much of the lead management work, helping students to think about the submissions in more depth, leading meetings, and connecting with students about where they are in reviewing work.

Student Roles

All students take on the role of editor. There are variations of the editor role to accommodate various skill sets. These roles include:

Editor(s)-in-Chief: This role is for the student who has shown the most dedication to the magazine. This person is responsible for contributing to the magazine, emailing staff and contributors, and keeping the team on task.

Editor/Genre Editor: These roles are for students who are also decision makers with regard to content. These students read either all submissions or the submissions that fall under the genre for which they are responsible. These genres include Poetry, Fiction, Nonfiction (reviews, essays, blogs, etc.), Graphic Design, and Photography. These editors sift through the content and then bring the best of that genre to the table for the entire staff to choose from.

Layout Editor(s): These students are responsible for the overall look and appearance of the magazine. They are also responsible for inserting the accepted content and front/back matter for each issue.

Web Manager(s): These students are responsible for maintaining the Tumblr blog. They correspond with the online community through comments and feedback and look for other students and/or blogs of interest to add and reach out to. While these students maintain the blog, all staff are responsible for contributing to the blog.

Promotion & Outreach: Students who are part of promotion and outreach are responsible for soliciting student work for the magazine, getting the word out about the magazine, and making use of other forms of communication that will help the magazine gain readership and contributions.

Students are free to engage in whichever role they feel most comfortable and confident in. If a student is unsure about a role, mentors can engage him or her in conversation about what that student likes to do in general, keeping an ear out for activities that use the same skill sets, either technical or contextual, as one of the roles within the magazine. Some students are asked to work with the magazine based on a talent or skill they have exhibited in other YOUmedia projects and activities.

The structure of YouLit allows students to have a specific task while also being flexible enough to participate and learn in other roles of the magazine, allowing them to make as much of a contribution to the magazine as they wish.

Curriculum Scope and Sequence

Program Content and Schedule

YouLit Magazine is an online literary magazine that is contributed to and edited by high school students. The magazine seeks to include all forms of writing, graphic design, and photography by teens. Students learn the process of magazine publication and e-publication along with skills in design and layout, modeling and practicing their skills within a structure that exists in the professional literary industry.

YouLit meets once a week year-round.

Offline and Online Tools for Creating and Sharing Digital Products

The artifact created is an online digital literary magazine. Within the issue there are poetry, fiction, essays, reviews, graphics, and photography. Below are the first three issues of the magazine. There were major changes made from the first to the second issue.

Issue #1: http://issuu.com/youmediachicago/docs/youlit_issue_1

Issue #2: http://issuu.com/youmediachicago/docs/youlit_issue__2__issuu_ Issue #3: http://issuu.com/youmediachicago/docs/youlit_issue__3

As noted, YOUmedia Chicago uses the HIVE network to conduct any discussions and post meeting notes and announcements to the community about the publishing and editorial opportunities. They also use it for student editors to contribute their work to the magazine.

Tools and Practices to Support Reflection

The first issue was very short, and certain layout aspects were not as organized or professional looking as they could be. From there, the group made a lot of specific changes and completely re-imagined the magazine to bring it up to a higher, more appealing standard.

The process supports reflection in that students rigorously discuss each submission, often not agreeing on whether a certain submission should or should not be accepted. There is an option to accept a submission "with edits." Student contributors then have the opportunity to revise their work based on the suggestions of the editorial staff. This process also applies to the content generated by the editorial staff. They must also submit their work before the group and receive critique and feedback from their peers, making any edits before its inclusion in the issue.

To ensure there are no typos or grammatical errors, the staff also proofreads each issue.

Community Rules

The rules for participation include being diligent about reviewing submissions, participating in the decision- making process, attending meetings or, if one cannot attend meetings, then submitting comments on the submissions, and meeting deadlines. This is important as some students live farther out in the city and attend Track E schools, making it difficult to get downtown for meetings. If the previously stated tasks do not happen, the magazine cannot happen.

Youth are held accountable by reminding them that this is their magazine and without their work and support, the magazine cannot be released. If students want the magazine to be released, they have to put in the time. Students who do not actively participate and help are not recognized in the issue as an editor.

Physical Space

YouLit Magazine meetings take place in the "geeking out" space of YOUmedia. This is the space where students typically participate in workshops.

Target Audience

The youth who tend to join YouLit are students who are writers/artists themselves, have participated on their high school literary magazines in the past, and are opinionated and passionate about the true youth voice being heard. A YouLit student is adamant about the idea that teens care about things besides fashion and pop culture and that they are aware and participate in current world culture and affairs.

Age range. 14-18 years of age

Skill level. A student must be able to think critically about another's work and remain open-minded. Other than this, there are no required skills to participate in the project. Any student at any level can come in and be a part of YouLit. The self-paced work comes with reading the submissions and helping to maintain the blog site. The one-on-one learning occurs in checking in with students about their specific tasks or showing a student how to format a particular part of the magazine.

Rather than arriving with a certain set of skills, students gains skills by participating. This project is more about learning the skills of curation rather than creating the content itself.

HOMAGO and How "Leveling Up" Is Facilitated
(HOMAGO is Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out)

YouLit exists in the Messing Around and Geeking Out portion of HOMAGO. Students who have a dedicated interest in a certain aspect of the project "geek out" because they are continuing to actively engage in what they already enjoy doing. There is also space for a student to come into the magazine as a means of open exploration. Or, if they already have a slight interest in something, there is space for them to further explore that interest or come to find they like to do something completely outside of what they thought they would enjoy or be skilled at by simply participating in the magazine.

Core Competencies Gained

Badges can be awarded at the completion of each task laid out at the beginning of each new production schedule. This will provide a trajectory of the work for both new students and veteran students so they can see what badges the particular issue will yield.

Individual skills to be developed and their associated badges include:
- » **Journalist badge**
- » **Copywriter badge**
- » **Graphic Layout badge**
- » **Blogger badge**
- » **Cover Image badge**
- » **Feature Artist badge**
- » **Community Promoter badge**
- » **Editor badge**

Broader skill sets or competencies acquired (and associated badges) include the curator badge, marketing and promotion badge, theme master badge, and people skills badge.

When skill-based badges are awarded, the mentor can evaluate the student's badge portfolio and see if the acquired skill badges have allowed a student to reach a role badge.

Research and Evaluation

Success Defined

Success for YouLit is the magazine being published on time. This demonstrates that the production team is functioning smoothly, meeting deadlines, and holding everyone accountable for the expected work. Further success would be reflected in the magazine's ability to expand the work beyond just the magazine and introducing and accomplishing other publishing products, for example, an e-publication of a book of poems.

Success can also be measured in students' use of skills beyond the workshop or by the number of views for each issue.

Information Collected to Evaluate Success

The mentor receives feedback from the students regarding the current issue and how to improve the next issue.

How This Information Is Used to Inform New Iterations of the Program

Once students have critically evaluated an issue, they can move forward and plan for the next issue, keeping in mind the weaknesses of the previous issue and maximizing on the strengths of the previous issue.

Multimedia Resources

- » **http://youlitmag.tumblr.com**
- » **Issue #1: http://issuu.com/youmediachicago/docs/youlit_issue_1**
- » **Issue #2: http://issuu.com/youmediachicago/docs/youlit_issue__2__issuu_**
- » **Issue #3: http://issuu.com/youmediachicago/docs/youlit_issue__3**

YOUmedia Records

Context

YOUmedia Records is a spin off from Digital Youth Network's "record label" curriculum. The curriculum was implemented at YOUmedia with the idea that students would function collectively to produce various media formats, such as graphic design work for album covers, music for film, photography for photo shoots, and so forth. YOUmedia Records has different departments similar to a real record label, such as graphic design, videography, publicity or E-Press, music production, photography, and of course, the performers.

YOUmedia Record's first official project kicked off in November 2010 around the theme of originality. The challenge for this compilation was to create all original music and lyrics. Although the majority of artists look for music through the use of industry beats and sampling, we challenged YOUmedia students to create song ideas from scratch with the support and assistance from YOUmedia Records president Jabari Mbwelera and a lead mentor.

In YOUmedia's first year, there seemed to some separation between artists, graphic designers, film students, and producers in the space. Students would approach me to write songs or make beats for them. The fact is that they didn't really know one another, and we seemed to need an ice breaker.

I announced to students that they would participate in a showcase with special restrictions:

A) **No cursing.** This would force rappers to consciously think about changing their lyrics. A lot of rappers who are in their teens mimic other artists. They seem to unconsciously write lyrics that they've heard before and use curse words randomly.

B) **No use of industry beats.** Industry beats are instrumentals that can be purchased online. They are nonexclusive with other restrictions. Students find it really easy to just download these instrumentals, record themselves rapping or singing over them, and use them for a mix tape. With this model in place, no student would ever feel the need to either learn how to make music themselves or collaborate with another student who knows how to make music

C) **No sampling.** This would challenge student producers to create their songs from scratch.

Connected Learning Principles

- » Production-centered
- » Interest-powered
- » Peer-supported
- » Shared purpose

Videos

https://vimeo.com/9288724

George and James talk about how learning to make digital music has helped them express themselves and reach wider audiences. "We connected with people during the summer who were from New York, Atlanta, Los Angeles, who liked our music," George says. "And I'm still keeping in contact with them, giving them new music, even from the UK."

https://vimeo.com/17232985

Daniel Robbins takes his music to the next level with digital mixing equipment and software—and some social media marketing savvy. Robbins, a talented musician, completed "The Endless Summer Project," an album he recorded and mixed. While the finished product reflects the countless hours of painstakingly separating each music track and polishing the sound, it took some convincing to nudge Robbins beyond his comfort zone.

Program Details

YOUmedia Records is managed by high school students at YOUmedia Chicago who are musicians, lyricists, producers, engineers, and poets. Students assume different roles, mirroring those in the music industry. They create music, video, graphic design, critiques, and write biographies. The genres of musical projects range from hip-hop to folk, from poetry to jazz and beyond. The project engages students in different roles (see next page).

Tools Used

Students create music through collaboration and use of YOUmedia's recording studio. Students are also free to use other musical hardware and software located throughout the space such as keyboards, turntables, MPC2500, Korg Electribe, NuMark iDJ, Fruity Loops, and Pro Tools.

Mentors' Roles

The mentor role focuses on interest-based learning. The mentor asks students first what they are interested in doing within the label (graphics, production, etc.). While at first, students claim that they do not have any skills for a label, it is more likely a case of finding a good match for them. The mentor's role is to help them figure out what they're good at. One method is to create a list of positions available so they can see that not all positions require creativity. After further discussion, the mentor places students in well-matched roles.

The mentor lets students run the program. He or she lets them know what needs to happen, but also gives them the freedom for determining how to make it happen. This holds them accountable, as well. The mentor will step in only as necessary.

Student Roles

The main roles that students assume include:
- » **President:** Helps the mentor keep up with where artists are in their tasks and helps to keep these artists on task.
- » **Vice-president:** Shares responsibilities with President.
- » **Project Manager:** Ensures that events are updated online and posts all videos and music on all of the project's online pages.
- » **Lead Engineer:** Helps students in recording and mixing their projects.
- » **E-Press Team:** Responsible for photography and filming of events and interviewing artists.

Curriculum Scope and Sequence

The program does not rely completely on a curriculum. Most learning and teaching occurs in the process of implementation. Mentors do more facilitating than anything. YOUmedia Records is very hands on.

Mentors do create lessons within existing workshops (see below) that correlate to what the students are doing in the record label. For example, one lesson was about copyrights, sampling, and performance rights agencies. At the end of the workshop, students were asked to join BMI.

Another assignment was to learn how to write their biographies. The Project Manager and President helped those who struggled with the assignment. This lesson also included a segment for the E-Press team on how to conduct interviews; the mentor conducted a few interviews as a model.

One of the best workshops was on how to critique.

During special projects, the studio is reserved at a certain time each week for students to record their projects. During their time working on these projects, students may run into various troubles with the equipment, the direction of the song they're creating, or the options that are available as they create.

These are teachable moments. These are the moments when the students are leveling up because they seek out the solutions to these problems. The mentor can also create special workshops to help assist students for the larger project or use a current workshop to teach lessons centered around the larger project.

Students are encouraged to assist those who are creating music by critiquing them, filming them in the studio, working to capture their progress and/or process, or helping them create. This is another way for students to practice their skills of video and photography, thus leveling up. Before any performances, students critique one another. Students do mock performances while others watch and give their critique. Critique is taught using rubrics. Critiquing is another good tool for the spectator to learn about music. Sometimes students will accept a peer's critique more readily than a mentor's. The mentor usually instigates the critique to get them to talk more in depth. Only when there is no response does the mentor step in with a critique.

Any time a student is using the music equipment, he or she is learning about it. The more they learn, the more they level up. Students at the highest level are the production engineers. YOUmedia Records certifies students on the equipment; the certification assures basic understanding of the microphones, speakers, and other equipment. An opportunity to recruit students to Recording/Editing/Mixing workshops is when they come to mentors with questions, particularly pertaining to GarageBand. The workshop teaches students how to be better engineers in a very hands-on way. The mentors also bring in guest artists for the students to practice with, which is a great opportunity to move beyond recording just vocals.

In the creative process, everything repeats. You just get better at it. You do something, the same thing, over and over again. That's how you get better, and that's how you level up. The cycle of iteration is when we use the same concepts, tasks, and skills in the next project. For instance, the same process used in starting the first YOUmedia Records Showcase will be used in the What's Going On Now? project. At some point, it gets repetitive and students will begin to understand the process and hopefully use it for their personal processes.

In addition to the Recording/Editing/Mixing workshops, we offer Sounds About Write, in which students learn all aspects of songwriting, from lyrical writing to music composition to production. Artists of the label can take advantage of this workshop, although they are not required to attend.

Students can also take advantage of the graphic design workshops and film workshops. This workshop offers a quick demonstration of how to use a piece of equipment that is stationed at YOUmedia.

Offline and Online Tools for Creating and Sharing Digital Products

Online performance spaces include Reverbnation.com, SoundCloud.com, Bandcamp.com, Facebook.com, Issuu.com, YouTube.com, and Vimeo.com.

Online sites give students a platform to share their work with other peers, adults, and fellow artists. As the label staff posted artists' work, the artists started taking more ownership for how their pages looked. They became more knowledgeable about how to market themselves. Some started making videos and posting them on ReverbNation. See "Multimedia Resources" for examples of student work.

Physical Space

Physical performances have taken place in the Hang Out space of YOUmedia, the Pritzker Auditorium in the Harold Washington Library Center, Digital Youth Network's studio (now former), and other spaces.

Target Audience

The target audience is not limited to those who already have an interest in music. It takes some recruiting, and many students claim they don't know how to sing, but after assuring them that there is more to it than singing and discussing how they can participate, many sign up.

Age range. 16-18

Skill level. Whatever skills students bring to the table. Once the mentor discovers what their interests, skills, and hobbies are, he or she finds a way for them to participate. Opportunities include radio airplay on the Vocalo.org radio station and performances for other events. There are always leveling-up opportunities. When students need help recording, they are connected to an engineering student who can help them.

This provides a leveling-up opportunity for the engineer as well.

Core Competencies Gained

Badges for competencies include:

- » **Self-Motivation badge**
- » **Great Communicator badge**
- » **Collaboration badge**
- » **Leadership badge**
- » **"Passing The Knowledge" badge**
- » **DJ badge**
- » **Beginner, Intermediate, Expert GarageBand and Pro Tools badges**
- » **Certification badge**
- » **Engineer badge**
- » **Performer badge**
- » **Journalist badge**
- » **Photographer badge**
- » **Video Editing badge**
- » **A&R badge**
- » **LP badge**
- » **Song badge**
- » **Open Mic badge**