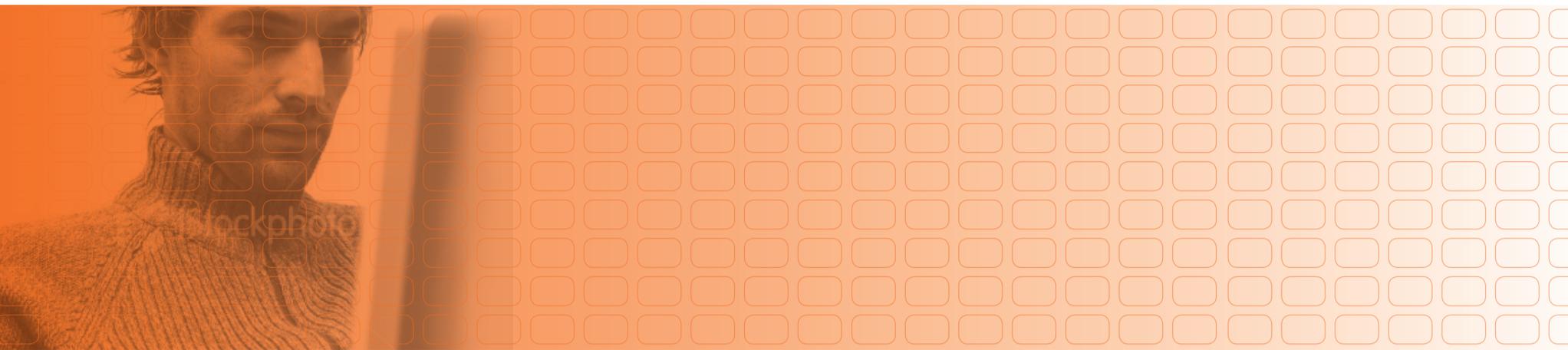


Connected Learning

PROGRAM GUIDE - YOUmedia Chicago

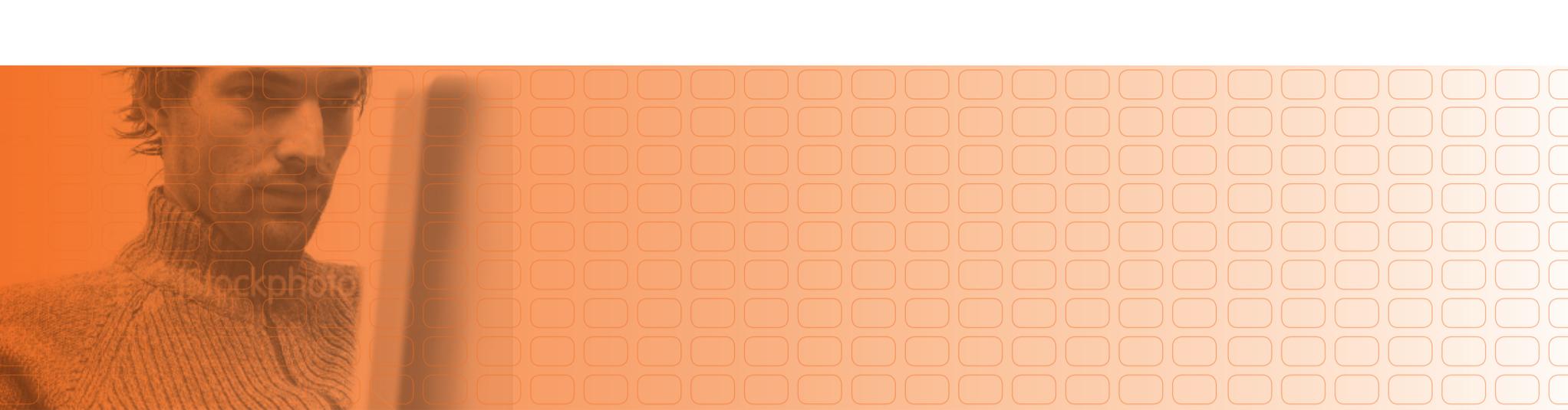


- » Lyricist Loft
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The Program Guide Working Group was comprised of the mentors and librarians who did the lionshare of the writing for each program. They include Taylor Bayless, Brother Mike Hawkins, Marcus Lumpkin, and Jennifer Steele, with project support from Cory Garfin.

The Advisors to the Working Group informed the overall goals and structure of the program guide and its relation to connected learning. They include An-Me Chung, Elyse Eidman-Aadahl, Amy Eshleman, Tene Gray, Christian Greer, Mimi Ito, Kiley Larson, Sybil Madison-Boyd, Katie Salen, Christina Timmins, and Connie Yowell.

Final production of the program guide was overseen by Barbara Ray of Hired Pen and her team.

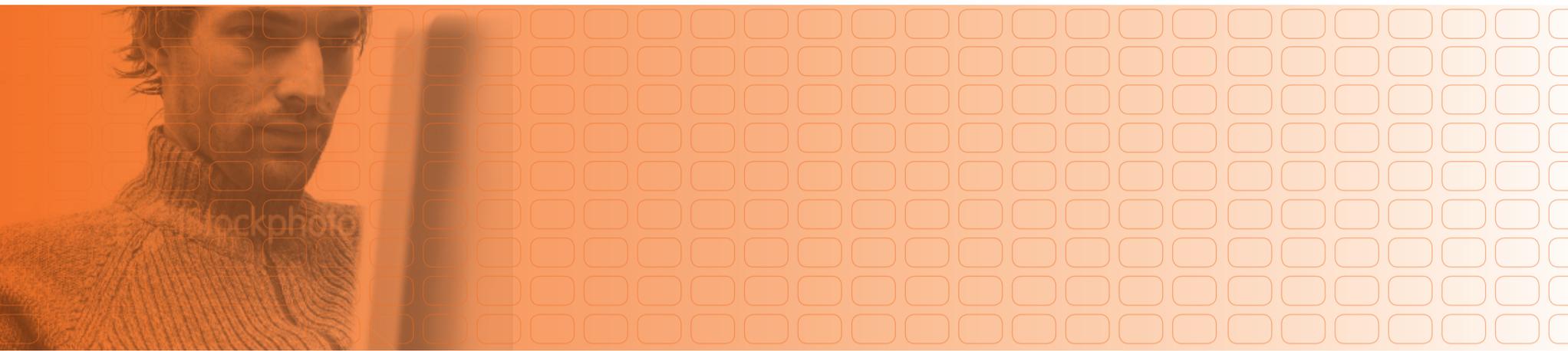
This work was generously supported by the MacArthur Foundation through its Digital Media and Learning initiative.

Together these contributors, and so many others, led the development of this program guide, and this project benefited significantly from their counsel and content.

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.

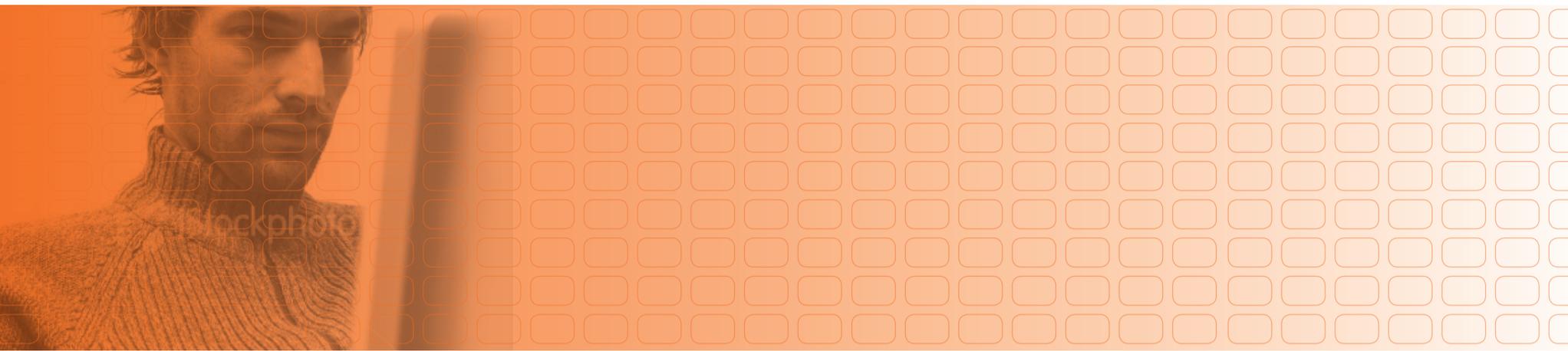
Program Guide Roadmap

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 offers a space where teens can develop and showcase their talents and 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 and promote 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

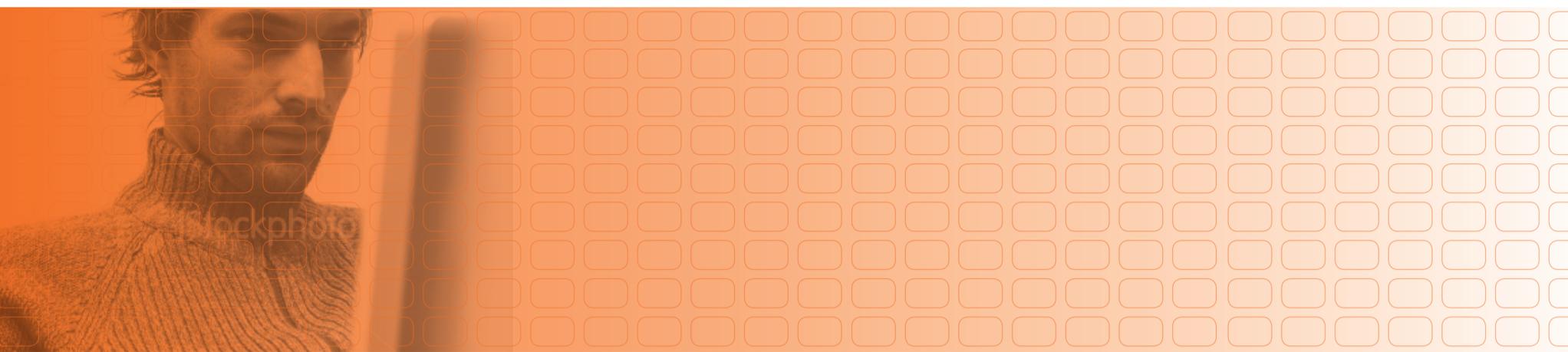
(HOMAGO is Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out)

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/) (<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/studentspeak/entry/changing-the-nature-of-storytelling-chicago-students-remix-neil-gaimans-nev/>).

Connected Learning PROGRAM GUIDE

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>)

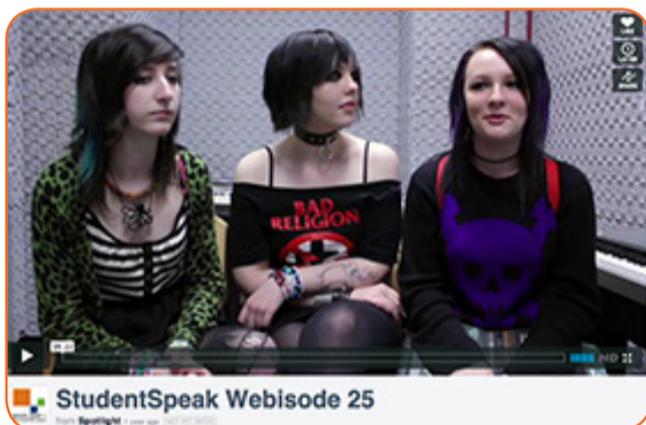
The One Book, One Chicago program, says Steele, underscores what it means to be a library patron and the value and importance of the library to their lives and their city.

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 Chicago*.



Neverwhere: <http://vimeo.com/23481043>



A Mercy: <http://vimeo.com/16226919>



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

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

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 Tóibín
- » **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.

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

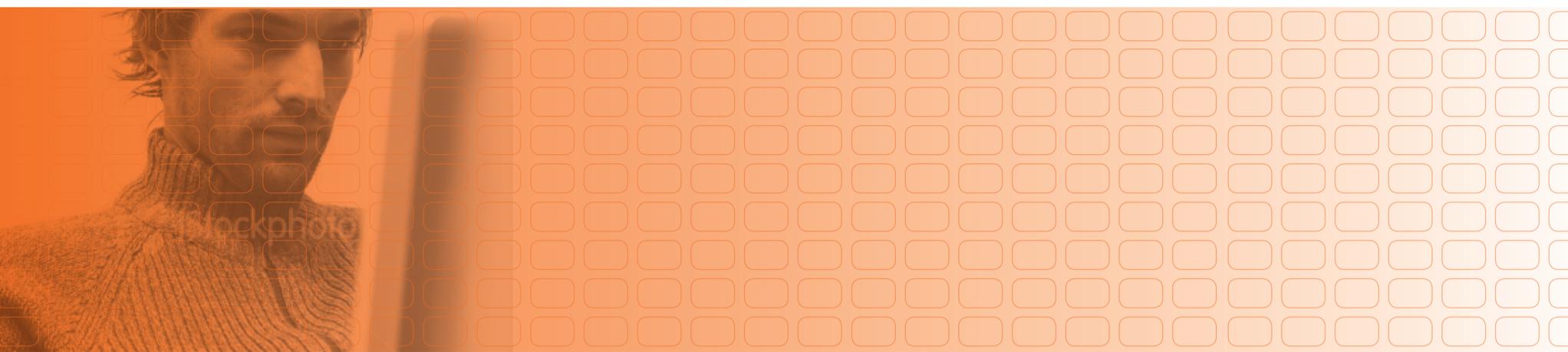
Skill level. Students in the after-school space who participate are required to have previously displayed skills in their media before joining. Students have all the resources available in YOUmedia to “level up” to the One Book level. They can take skill-building workshops, work one-on-one with mentors, 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-ifthere-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 students meet 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 HOMAGO¹) 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 involved. 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 knowledge of video games but also their critical thinking and public speaking skills.

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 (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 (this means simply participating in the planning and speaking during the podcast). This allows the main focus to be critical thinking about video game, 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.

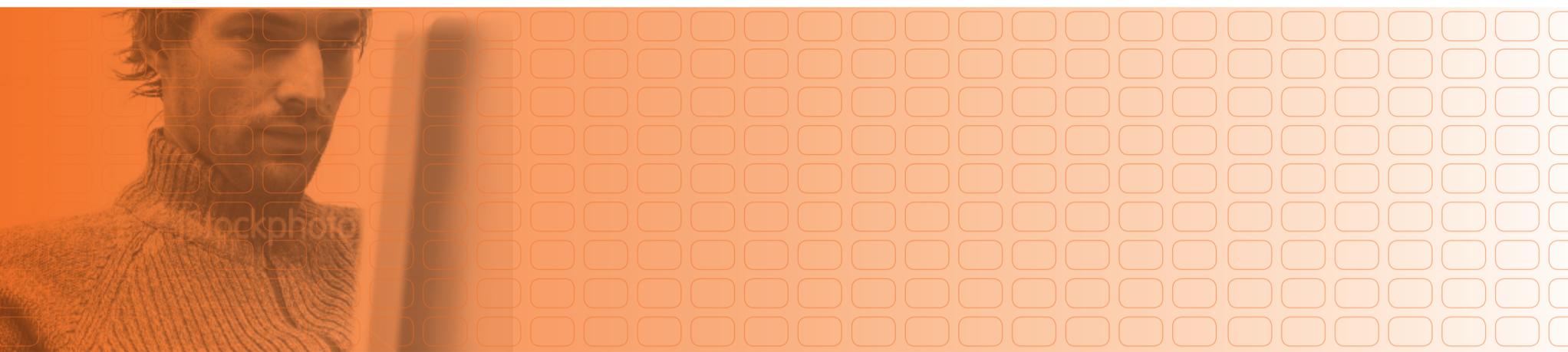
How This Information Is Used to Inform New Iterations of the Program

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 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 premier 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 offer a joint showcase of student writing, and 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 and 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, 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 gain 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

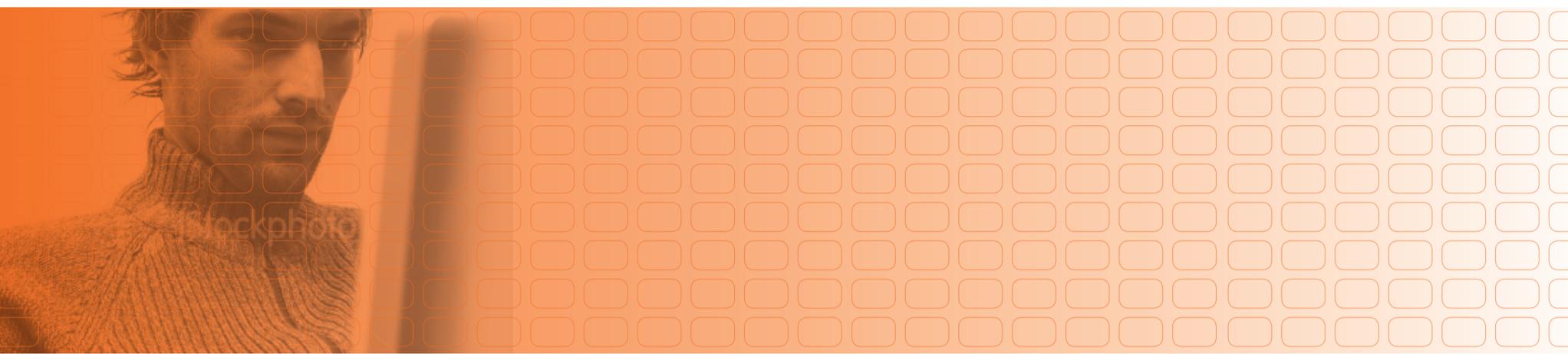
The mentor receives feedback from the students regarding the current issue and how to improve the next issue.

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 below).

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

Multimedia Resources

YOUmedia Records on ReverbNation

- » http://www.reverbnation.com/label/control_room/41965#!/justinjackson
- » http://www.reverbnation.com/label/control_room/41965#!/dannydisaster
- » http://www.reverbnation.com/label/control_room/41965#!/missmagic
- » http://www.reverbnation.com/label/control_room/41965#!/sarah1
- » http://www.reverbnation.com/label/control_room/41965#!/rayabercrombie
- » http://www.reverbnation.com/label/control_room/41965#!/SlickgZKC
- » http://www.reverbnation.com/label/control_room/41965#!/thaddeustukes

YOUmedia Records on bandcamp

- » <http://youmediarecords.bandcamp.com>

Interview examples:

- » <http://vimeo.com/18852202>
- » <http://vimeo.com/19978702>
- » <http://vimeo.com/20004729>
- » <http://vimeo.com/20025839>