

THE STUDIO

AT ANYTHINK LIBRARIES



The Connected Learning Alliance Series
on Connected Learning in Practice



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Produced by the Connected Learning Alliance



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Published by the Connected Learning Alliance. Irvine, CA. February 2019. A full-text PDF of this report is available as a free download from <https://clalliance.org/publications/>

Suggested citation:

Chang-Order, Josephina, Penuel, William R., Wortman, Amanda, Harris, Michael, Van Horne, Katie, Widman, Sari and Melia Repko-Erwin. 2019. *The Studio at Anythink Libraries*. Irvine, CA: Connected Learning Alliance.

CAPTURING CONNECTED LEARNING IN LIBRARIES



The Capturing Connected Learning in Libraries (CCLL) project—a research and practice collaboration between the Connected Learning Lab, CU Boulder, SRI International, Los Angeles Public Library (LAPL), YALSA, and YOUmedia—enables libraries to better assess learning outcomes for their connected learning programs and spaces, and it boosts their ability to use evaluation data to improve their programs. It is focused on identifying challenges connected learning programs face and helpful ways of addressing those challenges. This project is generously funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

THE STUDIO AT ANYTHINK LIBRARIES



Anythink has been supporting connected learning programming in its Thornton, Colorado, library since 2012. The brightly lit library includes **The Studio** for young people to hang out, explore new digital technologies, and go deeper with specific interest-based learning opportunities. With funding from IMLS for its expansion of **Learning Labs** built on the YOUmedia model, Anythink has been able to both sustain and study its programs. Anythink is a leader in developing innovative, usable tools for evaluating learning, including the talkback boards described here.

What Happens at The Studio?

In 2017, The Studio developed three focal areas based on youth interests around 3D printing, sewing, and jewelry making. Drop-in customers (Anythink uses the term customers for both youth and adult patrons; for more on Anythink, click [here](#)) could use technology tools such as 3D printers, embroidery and sewing machines, and jewelry-making kits for their own designs, or they could explore the activities of The Studio's three Experience Zones. Created by Studio staff to provide structured ways to learn about design and making, these Experience Zones were related to the three focal areas and included such activities as making woven necklaces, designing bookmarks, or fashioning Perler bead creations. During the fall, The Studio also offered scheduled classes with artists in residence.

How Did Anythink Partner to Co-develop Evaluation Tools?

Anythink had substantial staff interest in and capacity for developing new evaluation tools. Mo Yang, The Studio coordinator, intentionally built time into The Studio's daily routine for staff to participate in evaluation, and their weekly schedule enabled them to consider evaluation results and iterate on a relatively short timescale. The roots of the Anythink library system in the **YOUmedia model** and **connected learning principles**, as well as an established culture of data collection and customer centeredness, also made it an excellent partner for co-developing evaluation tools. The CCLL team focused on developing sets of questions to ask about the outcomes Anythink and The Studio wanted to understand.

EVALUATION PLAN DEVELOPMENT



In January 2017, the CCLL team met with Mo Yang to develop an evaluation plan that would involve three or four different approaches to evaluation. In conversation with Mo about Studio goals related to connected learning and **HOMAGO principles**, the CCLL team drew on existing items from the **Connected Learning survey** to serve as the foundation of the evaluation tools for The Studio. To develop survey and talkback board items that evaluated skill development and "leveling up," the team looked to constructs related to engineering and design skills (e.g., identifying a problem, prototyping, starting/finishing a project) as well as 21st Century skills (e.g., perseverance, problem-solving, and

information and communication technology literacy).¹ These constructs were primarily used in the longer surveys, particularly for staff who were reflecting on what they had observed customers doing. Finally, to capture information about audience and attendance, the CCLL team drew on items related to [youth program experiences](#).

EVALUATION PURPOSE AND OUTCOMES

At the broadest level, the Anythink library system wanted to understand how and when customers across various demographics used The Studio space in order to develop approaches for expanding its customer base. This understanding would also help Anythink scale up The Studio to other branches through mobile and self-sustaining kits. Within The Studio, the CCLL team and Mo focused on evaluating outcomes related to interest discovery and development, and skill development.

Anythink's Desired Outcomes	
Interest Discovery and Development	Customers are aware of The Studio as a place to access tools and resources to discover new interests. Customers have the chance to further develop existing interests through Studio activities.
Skill Development	Customers participating in The Studio gain skills and deepen participation across more challenging tools and design processes.

Tools Developed

Talkback boards. The CCLL team worked with Mo Yang to develop talkback boards based off his original use of them at Anythink. Talkback boards present questions or prompts for customers to answer, either by voting for possible choices or by writing short responses. To date, talkback boards have become a centerpiece of CCLL's project efforts because of their broad practical appeal. In 2017, The Studio used talkback boards focused on interest discovery and development, HOMAGO principles, and youth program experiences, but they also used more open-ended prompts to collect ideas for developing new programming.

Daily staff survey. Mo was very interested in capturing his staff's daily reflections on what they saw customers doing in their space, and he built in time at the end of every day for staff members to complete a survey. The survey the CCLL team originally designed asked staff members to record the specific tools and engineering, design, and 21st Century skills that customers used, as well as general reflections on the day and additional supports the staff needed.

¹ See for more information: Rotherham, Andrew J., and Daniel T. Willingham. 2010. "21st-Century' Skills." *American Educator* 17: 17-20.

Salas Pilco, Sdenka Z. 2013. "Evolution of the Framework for 21st Century Competencies." *Knowledge Management & E-Learning: An International Journal*.

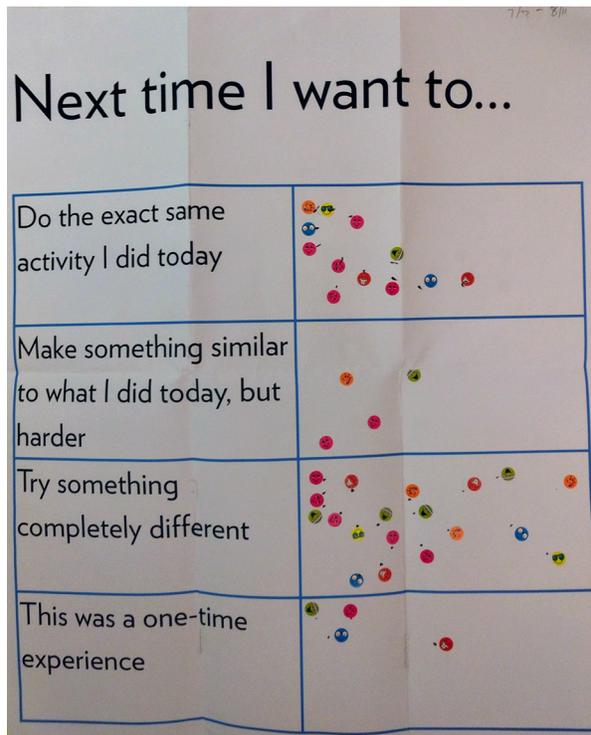
Customers often worked on multiple projects during their time in The Studio and in different ways; thus, new survey items were developed to capture which of the three focal areas (3D printing, textile design, or jewelry making) were used the most and the range of ways customers could engage.

LOOKING AT DATA

In this section are some examples of talkback boards from Anythink during 2017, and what the CCLL team learned from them.



From the above talkback board, intended to understand why customers came to Anythink, the CCLL team noticed that “hanging out” and “messaging around” were important reasons that young people came to The Studio. Also, many respondents on this talkback board reported that someone suggested they come there, or in connected learning terms, they were “**brokered into**” the space. Based on these data, the team thought that Mo could create a follow-up talkback board to find out who was suggesting that young people go to The Studio. The open-ended responses to “Other” indicated that there were some customers who were dropping in for the first time and were curious about what possibilities were available in The Studio. And, per The Studio’s interest in understanding what kinds of activities their customers wanted to do, it was important to leave the “Other” section open for suggestions such as the one listed above about creating video games.



The above talkback board was intended to capture how The Studio’s customers engaged in HOMAGO principles. As with the previous talkback board, most of the customers were “messing around,” based on the responses to the prompt “try something completely different.” The 12 customers who wanted to “do the exact same activity” may have been “messing around” or “geeking out,” but “geeking out” in terms of depth or “leveling up” was much less common. Fortunately, only a few customers saw their visit to The Studio as a one-time experience!

How Talkback Boards and Surveys Informed Practice

- ⦿ **Open-Ended Prompts:** For Mo, using more open-ended prompts for both the staff survey and the talkback boards has been beneficial for short-term planning of experience zones and activities.
- ⦿ **Looking at the Details:** Documenting details of what customers did at The Studio led to changes in the kinds of activities that were offered. For example, the popular Perler beads activity was eliminated because parents saw it as an easy “craft” for children who were younger than those The Studio was designed to support, and because there was no clear opportunity for customers to deepen their skills with another tool.
- ⦿ **Don’t Give Up:** In Anythink’s experience, it takes approximately three months for an activity to catch on with customers! Do not give up on activities too soon based on talkback board feedback. The Studio stuck with 3D design, jewelry making, and sewing for all of 2017.

Suggestions and Tips

- ⦿ **Talkback Board Tips:**
 - Talkback boards should have a template with the start date, end date, location of board in library, and the question youth are responding to, and a corresponding Excel sheet or other space for digital collection.

- A clear and practical set of outcomes should correlate with a range of behaviors patrons might do. For examples of outcomes and practical measures, watch video 2 in our video series [here](#).
- Decide whether to collect “sticky-dot” data or open-ended responses based on capacity for analyzing this data.
- Photos of talkback boards are great to show other library staff and stakeholders, and they serve as a backup digital record.
- 3M’s Post-it Notes app is helpful for organizing open-ended responses on sticky notes.

◎ **Staff Survey Tips:**

- Allow for built-in time for staff members to fill these out. The average time spent on The Studio survey was five to seven minutes.
- Allow time for supervisors to review responses together with staff.

◎ **Make a plan** for when your library will look at the data and plan what you are going to do with the data (e.g., pick a focus of the program and offerings, target marketing materials, report to funders or leadership). These plans help to develop buy-in from staff that these are useful tools that measure things that the institution needs to see.

- Questions to ask:
 - Where can you add time into the schedule to look at data?
 - When can you schedule employee time to prepare talkback boards, digitize the data, or take surveys?
 - Who on your team likes to organize spreadsheets or take detailed notes? Who knows what your audience likes to do and can create prompts for talkback boards?
 - Will you share the data with your audience?