

YOUTHEALTH AT HAROLD WASHINGTON LIBRARY

The Connected Learning Alliance Series
on Connected Learning in Practice

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CAPTURING CONNECTED LEARNING IN LIBRARIES



The decorative horizontal line consists of a thin grey line with four pink circular markers. From left to right, there is a small pink circle, a larger hollow pink circle, a small pink circle, and a small pink circle with a black dot inside.

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 that connected learning programs face and helpful ways of addressing those challenges. This project is generously funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

CASE STUDY: YOUMEDIA AT HAROLD WASHINGTON LIBRARY



YOUmedia started in 2009 as a partnership between the Chicago Public Library (CPL), DePaul University, and the Digital Youth Network. CPL's central library branch, Harold Washington Library Center, housed the first YOUmedia Chicago site. The YOUmedia model has since spread to 19 other community libraries in the system. YOUmedia sites are staffed by both grant-funded mentors and degree holding librarians. YOUmedia programs were designed based around Mizuko Ito's work on the youth engagement repertoires of Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out (HOMAGO). In addition to the expansion of YOUmedia sites, CPL has also been able to bring on roughly 20 additional teen librarians across the 81-branch system. The teen librarians also use HOMAGO and Connected Learning as frameworks for understanding youth learning and engagement.

What happens at YOUmedia?

YOUmedia provides drop-in programming for high school and middle school aged youth. At Harold Washington's 5,500 square foot site, activities are based on teen interest and revolve around several core content areas: photo and video, audio programming, graphic design, gaming, sewing and fashion, fine art, and making.

EVALUATION STRATEGIES, TOOLS, AND GOALS

Who are YOUmedia's stakeholders, and what are the outcomes they want to measure?

YOUmedia considers their primary stakeholders to be their staff, CPL's executive team, Chicago city commissioners, and teen patrons and program alum. They also do a lot of work with schools, so schools and teachers are stakeholders as well.

YOUmedia applies for several grants each year, coordinating these efforts with the Chicago Public Library Foundation. These grants help fund program supplies and have facilitated the program expansion described above. Some funders require YOUmedia to engage youth in specific program activities or require particular types of data collection.

The primary outcomes YOUmedia seeks to measure are attendance, youth interest development, staffing capacity, and HOMAGO principles. They also look at program participation trends for teens overall and at different time intervals—weekly, per program cycle, and annually. YOUmedia's central goal is to understand who their teen participants are, where they're coming from, and whether or not the programming is relevant to them. They would also like to identify measurable outcomes that would help them better understand what kind of social capital exists or develops in the YOUmedia space. For example, one form of social capital YOUmedia staff have seen emerge in the program has been teens influencing other teens in their decision to go to college or choosing a specific college based on relationships made at Harold Washington. Staff see the social capital benefits the program provides for teens, which they know they could better understand through interviews and observations. However, they don't have assessment tools to measure changes in participants' social capital to demonstrate its impact.

What kinds of evaluations does YOUmedia do?

Since the YOUmedia program needs to do a lot of grant reporting, staff have set up a good deal of data collection for these purposes. YOUmedia tracks both general attendance and program attendance, and staff document their own stories based on their observations. These data sources are also useful for making decisions about program design and improvement. Additional data collection tools used by YOUmedia to inform program development and improvement include staff surveys, user surveys with youth participants, and staff observation tools.

YOUmedia utilizes general user surveys to capture how teens are feeling about the space, the delivery of programs, and program offerings. The survey items were also designed to capture aspects of HOMAGO. In addition to the general user surveys they also conduct a “Senior Survey,” which functions as an exit survey for teens graduating high school. The survey asks youth where they are headed, whether time with YOUmedia was valuable, if they made connections that will go beyond the space, and if any of the programming has helped them reflect on and make decisions about future plans.

For the development of their staff observation tool, YOUmedia worked with “[Making Observations](#),” an IMLS-funded project initiated by the Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh to create observational tools to document learning through making and tinkering activities in museums and libraries. Making Observations’ framework was developed by the Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh so that any staff member or parent could observe the learning taking place in their many loosely structured programs and activity stations.

YOUmedia adapted these tools to meet the particular needs of their context and programs. For example, they adapted the observation tool to align with HOMAGO principles and to work for long term data collection, as some teens visit the program for upwards of five years. One important goal for adapting the tool was to assess the relational climate between teens and mentors, providing a deeper understanding of how Hanging Out functioned to support youth development goals. Elements of the observation tool have been integrated into YOUmedia’s program planning rubric and informs how the organization onboards new staff. The observation tool is still relatively new for YOUmedia, and they are still trying to figure out a system that works for observing staff. Staff with expertise in a particular content area may use the observation tool to give feedback to another staff member who is a beginner at facilitating programs in that area. The Admin team also plans to use the tool as a part of a larger continuous improvement plan. Additionally, the tool is sometimes used for onboarding new staff so that they can get a sense of what programs look like. [See appendix for the observation tool used by YOUmedia.](#)

YOUmedia has also engaged in collaborative assessment with other youth serving organizations, Chicago Public Schools, and a university-based policy research organization to understand more about their teen patrons. This collaboration facilitates data sharing across organizations, and allows YOUmedia and their partners to see patterns in youth demographics and attendance across organizations.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

YOUmedia has a small team that fluctuates in size and skill set at any given site. Limitations in staff capacity make aspects of evaluation, including data analysis, sometimes fall by the wayside. However, the program does have two members of the administrative staff who work on evaluation and regularly review the results of the observation tool. This effort helps the organization evaluate how staff are feeling about the work and understand how to support and help them plan for programming. Analysis of the staff and patron surveys has also been instrumental in informing how to design and provide professional development for staff.

The collaborative assessment done with other organizations in Chicago informs how YOUMedia expands their program into their 81 branch system, as well as how they foster new partnerships and conduct outreach efforts. For example, if its participant demographic data doesn't reflect public school demographic data, a branch may increase outreach efforts to schools or neighborhoods that serve the underrepresented population. The data also allows YOUMedia to identify which schools participating teens are coming from, which allows staff to do future outreach or program promotion with administrators at that school. Other city-level statistics, such as crime rate data, also inform decision making. For example, if an area of the city experiences a spike in crime, YOUMedia may consider adding a site at the local library to try to give the local youth a place to find youth-oriented programming.

YOUMedia has additionally used attendance and program data to redistribute staffing to best meet needs based on demand at different sites. Although the organization has recently been able to acquire funding to increase staffing numbers overall, it anticipates potential challenges in getting timely budget approval to increase staffing if, for example, a site got an unexpected influx of teens. These types of considerations make it essential to be able to determine where staff is most needed because of changes in attendance, needs to increase outreach efforts, or other factors affecting particular sites.

LESSONS LEARNED



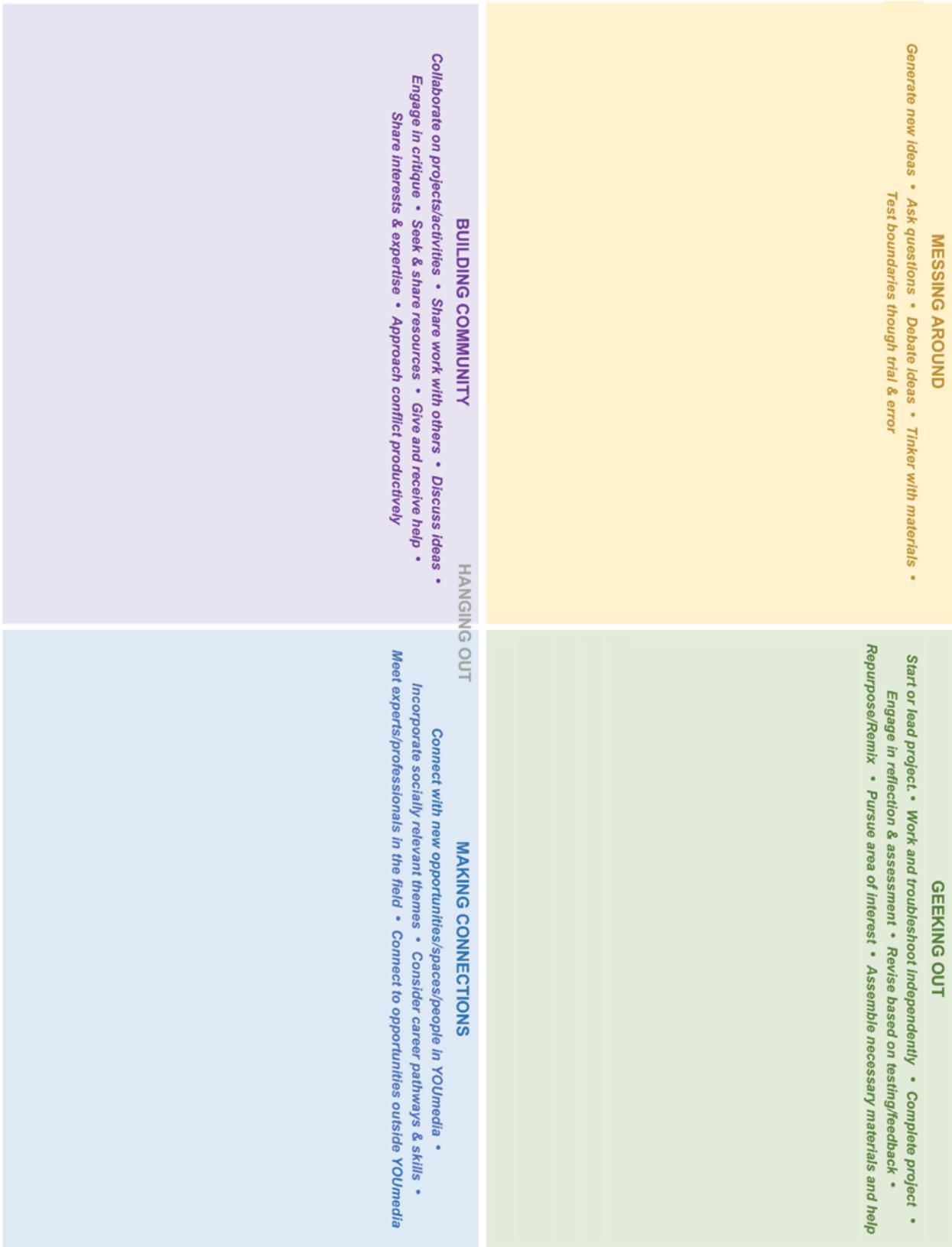
New Learning Labs that joined YOUMedia's national network (<https://youmedia.org/>) have had questions about how to facilitate programming to promote more geeking out—that is, mastering a skill or “getting beyond hanging out.” However, they have not focused as much on “hanging out.” The HO in HOMAGO, hanging out, is sometimes deprioritized or seen as less valuable by adults, especially those new to supporting drop-in learning settings. However, YOUMedia staff have noticed that the hanging out element of HOMAGO-based learning environments isn’t as simple as it seems. Hanging out is important because it helps youth deepen engagement through building relationships and ongoing attendance. It helps establish psychological safety among teen and adult participants, and solidifies the library’s role as a safe and reliable public institution. Many of Harold Washington’s teens attend alternative schools or otherwise don’t fit within the traditional institution of schooling, making access to a safe space with adult support especially important for them. The YOUMedia team came to understand that youth development goals were achieved not only through program activity, but through structural elements and implicit messaging in the environment they created for youth. These lessons are particularly helpful as the organization expands to more locations.

APPENDIX



See observation tool on the following pages.

1. Document what you see (during observation)



2. Reflect (after observation)

Did the mentor and/or space support (one or more) learning practices in any unique ways?

Story of a particular youth during the observation (extreme case, change in participation, etc.)?

Did you learn anything (about content, teens, community, etc.)?

Questions/suggestions/ideas for the mentor and/or program?

3. Details

Date _____ Time start _____ Time end _____ Observer name _____

YOUmedia branch _____

Observation focus:

Program? If so, Program name _____

What is happening in one area? If so, Space/location in YOUmedia observed _____

Description of activity:

Focal content area(s) _____

Practicing mentor name(s) _____

teens _____

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