



Designing for Engagement: The Benefits of High-Quality Arts Programming for Tweens
National Guild for Community Arts Education, Wallace Foundation, Research for Action
Webinar Q&A: Follow Up Questions

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LOGISTICS AND PLANNING

What would be the easiest program to implement?

None of them were really "easy" but some factors to consider that might make it less hard include: fitting within space (avoid choosing art forms not well-suited for the space, such as studio art without natural light); availability of instructors (select an art form where there is ample supply of teaching artists, possibly by partnering); low capital / start up costs (digital animation is much more expensive up front than a dance studio); and of course, youth interest, because selecting a program with low interest will make recruitment and retention a daily chore and drain energy from the effort.

Would you suspect that YAI would be successful in areas that are not necessarily determined low income or underserved?

The research on which YAI was based was done in low income areas, but it is reasonable and likely that more affluent youth would also be positively influenced by teaching artists who really know their craft; well-equipped studios; high expectations; mentorship, and other principles of success. We do know that the principles have been adapted and applied in non-arts settings (such as STEM) with good success.

Do you see a significant difference in effectiveness of peer-to-peer recruitment/engagement based on age? Are younger kids/teens/older teens more or less effective at bringing their peers along into activities/interests?

Although initially young people did not engage in peer-to-peer because they were protective of the time with PPTAs and the studio space, and did not want others to encroach on it, over time the older youth did more peer recruitment. That group of older tweens wanted the programs to be a vehicle for more social capital and saw benefits of its popularity within the Club. This seemed less important to younger tweens who sought more individualized time with artists.

What marketing techniques can be used to recruit people who are not familiar with the art center/program you're offering? i.e. Hispanic community, other under-represented groups.

We were in local media, print and tv, attended other community arts events but have found the most success by educating parents/guardians, teachers, board members, business partners and let them help spread the word.

What was the process to present the program in schools?

It was important to present it to the School District that it wasn't anything that we were looking to do in competition. Our District had just started its own art specialized track that was looking a small groups and high intensity young people to develop as "masters" in those art forms. At the same time we were looking more at exposing underserved youth to art hoping to spark interest, look towards 21 Century skill and workforce development.

Attendance seemed to reflect that a large number of kids did not attend more than once a week. With attendance policy how did you enforce the expectations of the kids?

Case by case and many times whether it was in the young artist's control. We addressed some of this in webinar; while our Club kids elected to participate in YAI, they were not necessarily "arts kids" who were wholly dedicated to arts as their exclusive out of school time activity. They often were fully engaged in other Club programming, and many of them had challenging situations at home and couldn't attend more than once per week. So our attendance policy really evolved into a attendance/performance and behavior policy. There was an expectation of regular attendance so skills could be built, but what constituted "regular" had to be flexible. However, when they were in the program, there were high expectations around behavior, motivation / effort, and focus.

Can we see visuals of the program recruitment materials? For example, how is a 'try it week' presented to youth?

Visuals were a mix of template-style posters provided by BGCA, and some posters made at the local Club level. They were mostly hung in the Clubs but some went into schools or neighborhoods (community

centers, bulletin boards). They typically featured the art form, an example of the outcome and highlighted the technology, the studio space, or both. For in-Club promotions, we featured photos of our own kids from recent programs because we knew if they saw kids they knew, it would be more real and persuasive. The idea of Try It week is consistent with our drop-in culture - just an invitation to see what it is all about, no obligation.

TEACHING ARTISTS + STAFF

How do you recruit Teaching Artist?

We found that it was important that working in arts, with young people, is something that makes sense within the artist's own career development. When doing this kind of work was a "hard detour" off their path, it usually didn't work out. But we've had good luck with both young artists who relate well to kids and who need the stability and space we can offer while they launch their careers, as well as artists who are more experienced and have more time on their hands as they move toward retirement or a second career. Being forthright about the salary and requirements is important. But for some organizations a better path may be partnership, where they can tap into a community of artists who want to work with young people without taking on the commitment of additional staff.

Any strategies for recruiting professional teaching artists for clubs with limited budget resources that could not hire a part-time teaching artist?

Explore partnerships with arts organizations, especially if they have as part of their mission to do community outreach and youth programs to build the next generation of engaged community members. You might find organizations that have facilities and artists but don't really have access to youth, which could be basis for partnership.

PROGRAM + EVALUATION

How did you introduce cultural art?

It was important for the subjects or forms to be culturally relevant and we best success around the initiative by hiring artists who were from the communities in which they were teaching. If they knew the kids and grew up on the same streets, there was both a strong connection and an understanding of relevant culture.

Can you briefly describe the type of artworks students produce? what projects were the most successful ones? Were projects theme-oriented? If so, what type of issues/themes the students explored through their art?

Locally here in Green Bay members produced comic books, a card game, 3d models, logos, original music and poetry, choreographed dance performances, videos ranging from silly quick skits or PSAs for

animal shelters, domestic abuse programs. We found success in blending and partnering art forms, teachers and youth. Also, keeping the project youth driven was key to its success. Social justice, ethnic diversity, bullying and mental health, personal stories of growth, family trauma are some of the more serious issues touched on.

Was there an event at the beginning of YAI for parents to attend and learn about the program/generate interest? Or only after programming was completed?

This varied by YAI site. Sometimes YAI was simply highlighted on tours on par with other programs – although the studio quality, works produced and the professionalism of the teaching artist probably registered as something special. You can somewhat imagine how impressive great space is if the parent was just expecting a basic arts and crafts room. Some Clubs highlighted the program during Family Nights which brought the programs to the larger group rather than bringing the parents to the studio. Depending on the artist and dance form, some found it useful to have a parent event to meet them – and set expectations for the program, because early pickups can be very disruptive and artists wanted parents to understand the expectations. In addition, because this was a research study, sometimes having parent events facilitated the completion of the paperwork for permission slips, waivers, and behavior/attendance contracts.

What leadership opportunities did students have in class and at the culminating events?

This also varied, but the common theme is that experienced youth in the program served three purposes. First, they created leverage for teaching artists by being assistants who could answer questions and help beginners, which allowed classes to move forward without bottlenecking the artist. Second, they modeled both skills and behavior to younger participants. And third, they had great leadership development opportunities for themselves. We didn't formalize the role of a youth leader, but allowed and encouraged these roles to happen organically in each program. We initially tried to formalize it but learned that the kids we thought wanted to be leaders really didn't, they wanted to work on their own projects and then we would turn around and a kid who has struggled was there helping out and demonstrating leadership skills.

Was there any measurement of the impact of these art programs in other programming areas?

Not that we measured. Parents reported better behavior and sometimes better grades at or focus in school (good grades were required for participation). Members self-reported a gain in social skills, problem solving, collaborating and other 21C skills as well as thinking of the arts as a career or educational opportunity.

Were there any career exploration initiatives implemented into YAI?

The strongest form of career exploration was the artist themselves, because many of our youth had never met someone who made their living by doing art; it was always presented as a hobby. The artists

in the program were often part of large communities of artists and this provided a network of opportunities for field trips or guest artists for program demonstrations.

Does a staff member stay in the room?

Yes, for the most part to keep that space a dedicated, special home base for programming. PPTAs were encouraged to visit other spaces, help with Club rotations, meals, snacks, announcements, run Bingo on family nights, go on field trips but always have that home base.

How about discipline? What were the ground rules?

Clubhouses have their set rules that revolve around "Respect". For others, yourself, the spaces and the staff... but each room is encouraged to have conversations and post room rules that are youth driven and agreed upon so self-policing is done by the peer group. If they aren't working, we look at them again or if there has been a significant amount of time that has passed or youth turnover then it's time to revise them.