

Connected Learning: From Outcomes Workshops to Survey Items

A Report from Outcome Workshops at Colorado Alliance For Creative Youth Development and Hive NYC 2015

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Introduction

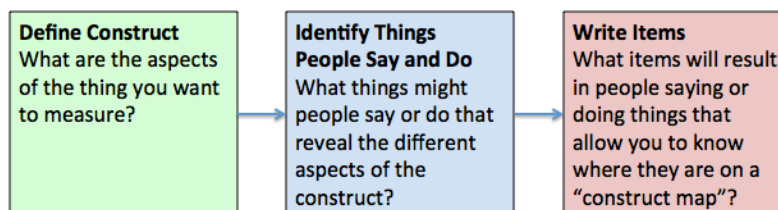
Educators and youth from organizations that use a Connected Learning approach in their youth programs met with researchers in winter 2015 to design new survey items to measure relevant program outcomes for youth. This report summarizes the process by which ideas generated by educators and youth were refined into survey items. The second half of the report shares survey items for Connected Learning principles (how youth experience programs) and outcomes (what youth report gaining from programs).

Goal

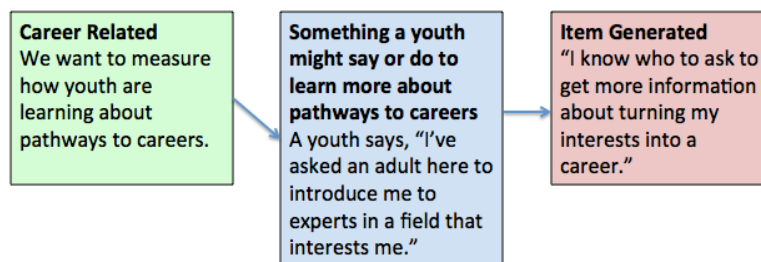
To work with educators from Connected Learning programs to refine our approach to measuring outcomes through survey items. We did this by defining constructs we wanted to measure and to brainstorming what youth might say or do that reveal evidence for different aspects of those constructs.

Workshops

Connected Learning outcome workshops were held by Rafi Santo and Dixie Ching at a Hive NYC community Meetup and by William Penuel, Katie Van Horne, Adam York, and Tim Podkul at a Colorado Alliance For Creative Youth Development meeting in the winter of 2015. The materials for the workshops are online and available for adaptation and use: <http://tinyurl.com/pwkzuts>. The workshops were designed to leverage educators' expertise with youth in their specific programs to identify outcomes that are relevant and important to organizations that use a Connected Learning approach in their programs. In this construct-centered¹ approach to measurement, we take experiences of youths and adults in programs and turn them into items that can distinguish between more and less successful outcomes for youth. The process looks like this:



The green and blue boxes were accomplished at the workshops and the process of writing the items came directly after using the statements generated in the workshops. The following diagram is an example of the process from our workshops:



¹ A construct-centered approach to measurement takes a detailed definition of a construct of interest and builds the items that are needed to understand key aspects of that construct. Construct-centered modeling is an iterative process and this workshop is an iteration of the Connected Learning survey design.

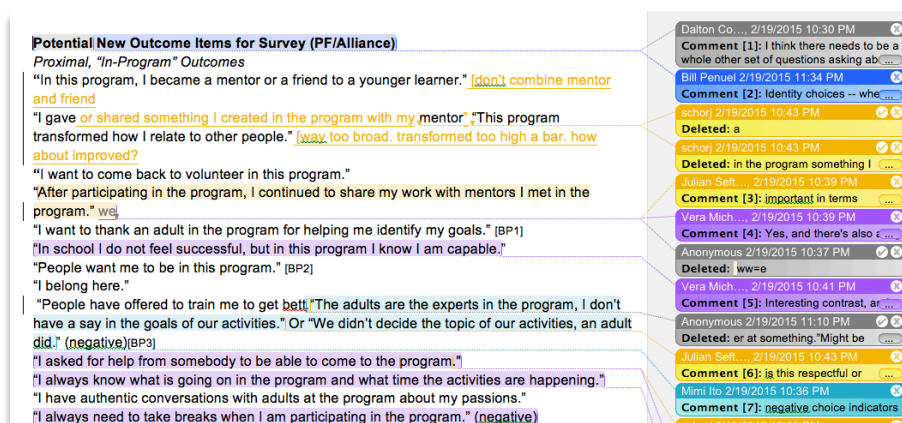
Prior to the workshop, we identified four categories of outcomes to focus on in the workshop:

- Deepening Satisfaction/Fulfillment/Joy,
- Success in Academics/Bonding to School,
- Advancing Career Goals/Goal Discovery, and
- Deepening Civic Engagement.

In addition, educators (and alumni youth from Platteforum) in each of the workshops were invited to identify other outcomes that they felt might be related to program-specific supports for youth.

Writing the Items

We collected the statements generated in the workshop about things people might say or do that indicate evidence for a construct and organized them into broad categories of outcomes outlined above and shared them with the larger community of the Connected Learning Research Network (CLRN; <http://clrn.dmlhub.net/>) for feedback. Connected Learning researchers and practitioners used a Google document to layer in their feedback, ask clarifying questions, edit wording, and note which statements were low-inference (i.e., easy to interpret what youth responses mean and which might be potentially difficult to interpret). The screenshot below depicts this process for a set of “in-program” items. The CU team then took this set of feedback, edited the items, and used ideas from the broader network to add items, modify items, and collect items into groups of principles and outcomes.



For example, for the statement, “After participating in the program, I continued to share my work with mentors I met in the program,” one person commented, “important in terms suggesting post activity independence,” and another followed up with, “Yes, and there's also a big serendipity factor as to whether or not this happens--that is, there are potentially life circumstances to overcome, and those who do have achieved something. Unless it's really easy for them.” In this first example, the researchers pointed out that it is important to measure independence after youth participate in the program but that given individuals’ life circumstances, it might be making measuring independence perhaps not as fruitful of an approach. In another example, the statement was, “I asked an adult from the program about his/her pathway to a career,” and someone suggested, “this phrasing seems unlikely...perhaps ‘how she or he found her/his job.’” Here, the suggested change is toward language that youth are more likely to use. Essentially, the researchers within the Connected Learning Research Network were able to review what Colorado Alliance For Creative Youth Development and Hive educators shared and figure out what, within that broad set of information, was viable to

use from their qualitative research experiences and from a measurement standpoint to help strengthen the survey.

In this editing process we also separated out items that were related to the Connected Learning principles: Shared Purpose, Openly Networked, Production Centered, Interest Powered, and Peer Supported² and added some existing items for measuring these principles to share with the community. This resulted in the following set of principle and outcome items developed from the design workshops with Hive NYC and Colorado Alliance For Creative Youth Development educators and youth, shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Connecting Learning Principles and Outcomes from Design Workshops

Connected Learning Principles	Youth Outcomes
<p>Shared Purpose <i>An experience of connected learning is one in which youth participants have a say in the purposes and structure of activity.</i></p>	<p>Proximal/ Program-Level Outcomes – Identity and Time Choices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving Back • Sense of Belonging / Access / Agency / Trust • Independence and Growth • Time-linked Program Valuing • Brokering
<p>Openly Networked <i>Digital media are essential tools for the openly networked principle. To say that a young person experiences a pursuit as openly networked is to assert that resources, tools, and materials for learning are diverse, accessible, and discoverable across the different settings of a young person’s life.</i></p>	<p>Career Related</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding pathways • Entrepreneurship
<p>Production Centered <i>Connected learning is designed around production, that is, around providing tools and opportunities for youth to produce, circulate, curate, and comment on media.</i></p>	<p>Deepening Satisfaction/Joy/Fulfillment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free time / me time • Increased fulfillment • Personal development / identity
<p>Interest Powered <i>Interest powered experiences are ones that are centered or organized around a participant’s interest and that allow a young person to develop knowledge or skill related to that interest.</i></p>	<p>Civic Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sense of a civic becoming • Program support and production for civic engagement • Developing civic awareness • Purposeful civic action
<p>Peer Supported <i>One important meaning of the term “connected” in connected learning is that it characterizes the way a young person experiences supportive connections to others as they pursue particular interests.</i></p>	<p>Academic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further schooling • Relevant connection to school

² Academically oriented items are not included in this report because in an initial study of the survey, the items in an initial study failed to measure the academically oriented principle.

Connected Learning Research Network Survey Items for Principles and Outcomes

These items are designed to be used with Likert-style agreement response unless otherwise noted (e.g., Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). These items will be shared with the CLRN and Digital Media and Learning (DML) communities for broader use within programs interested in measuring Connected Learning principles and outcomes of youth participation. Here are some starting ideas for using these items:

- Measuring Connected Learning principles helps to understand how youth are experiencing learning in programs, for youth, connected learning should be should (1) interest powered; (2) peer supported; (3) academically oriented; (4) production centered; (5) shared in purpose; and (6) openly networked. Items below are selected to measure all the principles except academically oriented.
- Measuring Outcomes helps to understand what youth have or have not gained from participating in the program. For example, a youth reports feeling more connected to the community by participating program or she reports continuing to pursue and share work after completing the program.
- We recommend choosing which principles and/or outcomes you would like to measure and then choosing a set of items from each category to use in a survey. Using multiple items to measure a principle or outcome allows you to get a more nuanced sense of youths' experiences.

Connected Learning Principles

(New items; CL Longitudinal Survey items)

Note: [activity] refers to a youth identified activity that they participate in. When using these items, youth can choose the activity or the activity can be predetermined by the program.

Shared Purpose

"We didn't decide the topic of our activities, an adult did." (negative)

"I have proposed my own ideas for a project we can do in this program."

"In [activity] there are clear goals."

"In [activity], everyone is trying to achieve the same goals."

"People in [activity] make sure that everyone has the opportunity to participate and contribute."

"In [activity], everyone gets a say."

"I feel like my ideas count in [activity]."

"I contribute to [activity]."

Openly Networked

"I've looked for opportunities to show others what I have learned here."

Answer True or False for the following questions.

- Someone I know here at [site] has helped me find other people who share my interests in [activity].
- It's easy to learn about places where I can engage in [activity].
- It's easy to find out the requirements for participating in all the activities at [site].

- I hear about cool things people do at [program], but I don't know how I can start to do those things.
- As I learn new things here, I gain skills that let me do even more challenging things.
- I don't really know where I could go to get better at [activity].
- It's easy for me to find information about new places to engage in [activity].
- It's difficult to find out when things are happening that to do with [activity]
- It's easy for me to find people at [the site] who share my interests in [activity]
- People here help me figure out where else [activity] can be done outside [the site].

Production Centered

"I used to be scared to share my work with others but now I love to have an audience."

"I don't like presenting my work in the program to others." (Negative)

"I have made something while engaging in [activity] that I didn't know how to make before."

"I always show things I make to other youth at [site] before they are finished."

"I want what I make to have an influence on what people outside [the site] do."

When you engage in [activity], how often do you:

(Never or hardly ever, 1-3 times a month, once a week, more than once a week)

- *Work with peers to create something*
- *Use tools that professionals use*
- *Learn about the ways that professionals use tools to create or design things*
- *Get help from adults on how to use tools to create or design things*
- *Use tools mainly designed for children and youth*
- *Work alone to create something*
- *Seek out new media and tools to use*
- *Find ways to use tools creatively*
- *Analyze or critique things other people have made*

Interest Powered

"I want to thank an adult in the program for helping me identify my goals."

"I have earned extra money so I can get further involved in the program."

"I learn things I can use elsewhere by participating in [activity]."

"I use the skills I develop through [activity] when I do other things."

"[Activity] is related to what I want to do for work in the future."

"By participating in [activity], I discovered a talent or an interest I didn't know I had."

"[Activity] changed my mind about what I wanted to do in the future."

"[Activity] helped me become more curious about things I wasn't interested in before."

Peer Supported

"People want me to be in this program."

"Other youth in my program listen to my ideas."

When participating in [activity] in the program:

(mark all that apply)

- A friend or peer shows me how to do something I want to learn

- If I have a question about something, a friend or peer is willing to answer
- I get ideas from other people my age
- I talk about the activity with other people my age here.
- I like to do the activity with other people my age who are here.
- If I get stuck in the activity, I can ask a peer.
- I share my ideas with others
- Peers in the activity are unwilling to answer questions I have.
- I mostly work alone (“by myself”).
- I tend to keep to myself.

New Connected Learning Outcome Items

Note: [activity] refers to a youth identified activity that they participate in. When using these items, youth can choose the activity or the activity can be predetermined by the program

Proximal/Program-Level Outcomes – Identity and Time Choices

- Giving Back
 - “In this program, I became a mentor to a younger learner.”
 - “In this program, I made friends with a younger learner.”
 - “I have volunteered my time in the program.”
 - “I want to come back to volunteer in this program.”
 - “I’ve asked to help out in the program.”
 - “I am interested in helping others in the program.”

- Sense of Belonging / Access / Agency / Trust
 - “In school I do not feel successful, but in this program I know I am capable.”
 - “I belong here.”
 - “I asked for help from somebody to be able to come to the program.”
 - “I always know what activities and events are going on in the program.”
 - I always know what time the program’s activities are happening.”
 - “I feel like the program has kept me out of trouble.”
 - “The adults in the program care about me.”
 - “I can take risks when I am at this program.”
 - “It feels like family when I come here.”
 - “This program isn’t any different from programs I’ve been to in the past.” (Negative)
 - “I don’t come to this program very often.” (Negative)
 - “I gave or shared something I created in the program with my mentor”

- Independence and Growth
 - “After participating in the program, I continued to share my work and ideas with mentors I met in the program.”
 - “This program improved how I relate to other people.”
 - “I have authentic conversations with adults at the program about my passions.”
 - “Before I came to this program, I didn’t know how important [activity] was to me. Now I look for chances to do [activity] in my free time.”

- “I am disappointed in what the program provides me.” (Negative)
- Time-linked Program Valuing
 - “I always need to take breaks when I am participating in the program.” (negative)
 - “I don’t have enough time to continue coming to the program.” (negative)
 - “What we do here is pointless.” (Negative)
 - “We do the same thing over and over again here.” (Negative)
 - “I often want to leave early when I am at the program.” (Negative)
 - “I chose to come to the program instead of doing something else today.”
- Brokering
 - “I have brought a friend to the program.”
 - “I’ve asked an adult at the program about other opportunities to do [activity].”
 - “I’ve asked an adult in the program to write me a recommendation for something.”
 - “I’ve asked to borrow resources from the program so I can do [activity] outside the program.”
 - “People here have suggested things for me to do outside here, but I am just not interested in them.” (Negative)
 - “I’ve asked an adult here to introduce me to experts in a field that interests me.”
 - “People have offered to help me get better at a skill I started in the program.”

Career-Related Outcomes

- Understanding Pathways
 - “I asked an adult from the program about his/her pathway to a career.”
 - “I know how my interest can become a career.”
 - “As a result of this program, I know about more jobs available in my interest area”
 - I know who to ask to get more information about turning my interests into a career.”
 - “Before coming to the program, I didn’t know I could make [activity] a career.”
 - “I learned I can find a job doing something I do in my free time now.”
 - “Knowing how to do [activity] will help me in the future.”
 - “I found a summer job using the skills I learned here.”
- Entrepreneurship
 - “I started my own business.”
 - “As a result of participating in this program, I want to start my own business.”
 - “I have received funding to pursue an idea or a passion.”
 - “I made money from something I created or a job I did in the program”

Deepening Satisfaction/Joy/Fulfillment

- Free time/Me time
 - “I spend my free time doing [activity].”
 - “I learned a new skill in the program and now I do it on my own time.”
 - “I spend my own money to do [activity].”

- “I’ve researched something I got interested in at the program on my own.”
- Increased Fulfillment
 - “Doing [activity] makes me feel good.”
 - “I tell my friends to be part of this program.”
 - “I enjoy the program, and I wish I’d learned about this program sooner.”
- Personal Development/identity
 - “I know that I am a creative genius.”
 - “I have more confidence in speaking to others about my work since coming here.”
 - “I am not creative enough to do good work here.” (Negative)

Civic Engagement

- Sense of a Civic Becoming
 - “I feel part of a cause bigger than me when I’m here”
 - “Doing [activity] is relevant to my community.”
 - “Doing [activity] makes me a better community member.”
- Program Support and Production for Civic Engagement
 - “I’ve shared my work (or skills) with audiences outside of the program”
 - “Things I’ve created here have a message that I want people to hear”
 - Things I’ve created here can help my community.”
- Developing Civic Awareness
 - “Participating in the program has made me more aware of issues in my community.”
 - “There’s nothing you can do to make things better in our community.” (Negative)
 - “The more I learn about injustice and inequality in our society, the more hopeless I feel.” (interim phase of development)
 - “I didn’t know that art [or activity] can have a message.”
 - “The more I learn about injustice and inequality in our society, the more I want to get involved in working for change.”
 - “My story won’t make a difference to helping change society.” (Negative)
- Purposeful Civic Action
 - “I suggested an idea for how this program can help in the community.”
 - “I’ve looked for people who can work with me to work for change in our community.”
 - “I’ve worked with others to analyze the root causes of problems in society.”
 - “I’ve shared what I’ve learned about inequality in society with others.”
 - I’ve shared what I’ve learned about how to take action against injustice in society with others.”
 - “To help my community, I seek out extra training opportunities beyond the program.”

Academic

- Further Schooling
 - “[Activity] won’t help me get into college so I don’t spend extra time doing it” (Negative)

- “I’ve applied to programs where I can pursue [activity] in college.”
- “I decided to apply for college because I came to this program”
- “I changed my idea about what I want to learn more about after high school because I came to the program.”

- Relevant Connection to School
 - “The program is fun for me but I don’t see how it is relevant to school.” (Negative)
 - “I have used an idea from the program to present in school.”
 - As a result of this program, school seems more relevant to me (or I take school more seriously).
 - As a result of this program, I’m more focused and on task in school.
 - “I’ve used something I learned doing [activity] in a class report or presentation.”
 - “Since I started coming here, I joined a club at school related to what I do here.”
 - “A teacher asked me to do a presentation on something I am doing here.”
 - “I skipped school to be here today.” (Negative)