

Capturing Connected Learning in Libraries

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The Need

As libraries adopt connected learning approaches to engage today's digital youth (Braun, Hartman, Hughes-Hassell, & Kumasi, 2014; Ito et al. 2013; Penuel, 2015), they need new ways to describe and improve services and document learning outcomes. Since 2011, the Connected Learning Research Network (CLRN) has been building new approaches to studying and supporting connected learning—learning that is participatory, socially connected, interest-driven, and oriented towards educational opportunity. In partnership with youth development programs, and with the support of SRI, CLRN has developed and tested instruments for measuring connected learning that can be used for both improving services and demonstrating their value (<http://researchtools.dmlhub.net/>). This work includes research with YOUMedia learning labs and other library partners. Ito has led on developing the connected learning model as chair of CLRN. Michalchik and Penuel have developed the measures for CLRN, and are leading specialists in assessment and evaluation in informal settings.

Based on our prior work, we see a need for evaluation tools tailored to library needs, as well as an opportunity to strengthen the collaboration between CLRN researchers and library practitioners to improve and expand connected learning programs. The development, integration, and spread of connected learning in libraries could be accelerated if practitioners had access to user-friendly tools that serve formative needs for feedback on specific programs features. We also see a need for a broader evidence base on the connected learning program outcomes for communication with funders, policy makers, and other stakeholders. Our research questions include: What evaluation tools and practices can best support the development and improvement of connected learning programs in libraries? What are the learning outcomes of connected learning programs in libraries?

The Proposed Project

The Capturing Connected Learning in Libraries (CCLL) project is a research+practice collaboration between the Los Angeles Public Library, YALSA and CLRN researchers, focused on identifying persistent problems of practice and ways of addressing those problems (Penuel, Fishman, Cheng, & Sabelli, 2011). The project will support both formative evaluation (program-level documentation and use of data on implementation successes and challenges) and assessment (identifying and documenting learning outcomes). Additionally, CCLL will support the development of methods for evaluating the scope and influence of library services and will synthesize findings from evaluation efforts within its scope to contribute to the understanding of connected learning efforts in libraries. The project will use the principles of design-based implementation research (DBIR; <http://learndbir.org/>) for collaboratively identifying and addressing challenges libraries face in documentation and evaluation.

Year One: Surveying and Cataloging. In year one of the grant, CCLL will work with LAPL and YALSA to survey and interview 40-50 youth librarians to contribute to (a) a needs assessment and (b) a catalog of measures and examples of their use in evaluating connected learning services. As part of this, we will

conduct a thorough review of existing library evaluation frameworks and efforts such as those developed by the Public Library Association, libraryedge.org, ACRL, and the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh's IMLS funded Making and Learning project in order to harmonize our efforts. We will use this data to organize evaluation plan templates linked to specific use cases and to catalogue relevant instruments created by CCLL and collected from other sources. The LAPL system has an extensive network of youth librarians who have been developing programs focused on making and the digital arts and which embody a connected learning approach. We will build on this network to cultivate a first tier of librarians interested in receiving specialized support and building a broader network.

Year Two: Consultation and Adaptation. In year two, the CCLL team will work with LAPL and YALSA members and their evaluation partners in other regions to test and refine the templates and instruments developed in year one. CCLL researchers will note needs not met by existing resources and develop and pilot new instruments to meet those needs. Year two will also include a conference and webinars with first tier participants and a newly recruited second tier of participating organizations, supporting regional hubs to promote involvement. The face-to-face and online events will include a mix of co-design meetings aimed at brainstorming evaluation designs and items, providing feedback on instruments, and professional development workshops to support librarians' use of the tools and interpretation of results. First tier participants will assist with engaging new members in the alliance.

Year Three: Synthesis. In its third year, CCLL will continue to support the refinement of and professional development around evaluation tools and practices through webinars and convenings. We will also analyze and synthesize the evidence base emerging from evaluations. This effort will include drawing from the studies to highlight key program elements that support connected learning, as well as synthesizing evaluation results across our network. The outputs of the syntheses will include cross-case analyses of design features and outcomes, and research reports tailored to key audiences which include practitioners, researchers, funders, and policy makers. We will disseminate the evaluation tools, case studies, and reports through existing channels and communities where stakeholders are already connected, including sites like youmedia.org, informalscience.org, and LearnDBIR.org.

In summary, this project will develop the following resources: (1) instruments for evaluation and examples of program features, tailored to serve the needs of librarians developing connected learning services, (2) professional development resources and recorded webinars to support capacity building, offered through existing practitioner online sites and communities, (3) reports on the outcomes of connected learning in libraries targeted to key stakeholders. In addition to these concrete products, the project will advance the IMLS strategic priority, "Learning in Libraries" by linking research with library practice, developing cross-disciplinary partnerships, and helping scale innovative programs and practices.

Budget and justification. We are requesting a budget of \$500,000 for this project. This reflects the time of PIs and co-PIs (440 hours) and junior staff (2600 hours). The total budget also includes research activities and dissemination costs (\$150K): three face-to-face planning meetings of project personnel (\$45K), two conferences (\$27K and \$60K, respectively, in years 2 and 3), and six trips by two project staff to meet with partners to develop evaluation designs and processes for their connected learning services (\$18K). Monies are also allotted for librarian staff release time and partner honorariums (\$60K).