Connecting Children with the World: Integrating Online Inquiry into the Boys and Girls Club Education Centre

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ABSTRACT
The goal of this collaborative research project between the Queen’s University Faculty of Education and the Boys and Girls Club of Kingston and Area was to explore the use of an online environment to support member inquiries about problems in the world. The project is part of a program of research intended to develop an approach to engaging youth in an educationally relevant after-school program that extends beyond providing homework help. The Knowledge Innovation, and Design Studio (K.I.D.S.) is the approach that developed out of this collaboration. This approach uses activity structures designed to engage youth in meaningful design work with the intention of connecting them to the world. The on-line environment of Knowledge Forum was used by members at three different sites. This analysis focuses on the second of three phases that occurred during the year. In Phase 2, Site 1 and Site 2 collaborated.

AUTHENTIC PROBLEMS
Make Kingston more bike friendly
Cycling in winter
Musical instruments that are easy to play
Musical instruments that are easy to make
Sleeping in makes parent late
Homeless animals
Kids not getting outside enough at club
Hockey player protection
Frightened cat in Education Centre
Stop war, start peace
Asian Carp infestation in Great Lakes

FINDINGS
On-line collaboration – The primary goal of this study was to explore the use of an on-line environment to support collaboration between sites. Overall we found that members did not use the technology to collaborate on common projects; we observed low rates of note writing, building on, and reading (see Table 1). Social network analyses (see Figures 1 & 2) revealed some interaction between members across the two sites. The most prevalent use of the on-line environment appeared to be for sharing what members had produced in their local club settings.

STARTER UNIT – To assist in the dissemination of the K.I.D.S. approach, a two-week starter unit was successfully piloted by a teacher candidate during her Alternative Practicum. Critique as a key skill was incorporated into this starter unit.

REFERENCES