YOLLOCALLI OPEN STUDIO PRESENTS

HOMAGO

A GUIDEBOOK

HANG OUT
MESS AROUND
GEEK OUT

Produced with the cooperation of
HIVE LEARNING NETWORK & THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF MEXICAN ART
This is a handbook designed to be used by people who want to create a space for youth cultural production. It is based on our exploration, that began in June 2012 which included the launch of our first open studio class at Yollocalli Arts Reach called Experimental Sound Open Studio. Our primary inquiry was focused on how to take a model of an existing drop-in teen technology program and modify it to create open studio art courses. We wanted to invent a program where teaching artists became collaborative learning partners with youth. This was perhaps our greatest challenge. During the course of our investigation we found that we were heavily influenced by our experience as traditional classroom art teachers, but we were strongly motivated by our mutual belief in the power of youth as public intellectuals.

HOMAGO (Hang Out, Mess Around & Geek Out) is an experiential learning theory based on research by Mimi Itto on how youth learn in new and social media environments. Our goal was to explore how HOMAGO could be applied within a space of cultural production and how we could translate it into a method that would be useable by our teaching artists.

We undertook this project with support of Hive Chicago Learning Network and we consulted with experts including the Digital Youth Network from Chicago, and New Urban Arts
from Providence, Rhode Island. Teaching artist, Caleb Condit drove the program and he is credited for the success of our first open studio course. This has been a group effort, and as this is being written, we are planning for the third HOMAGO Arts program. Our efforts are ongoing.

Brenda Hernandez  
*Program Coordinator, Yollocalli Arts Reach*  
*MED Education Studies and Policy*  
*University of Illinois 2008*

Nicole Marroquin  
*Assistant Professor of Art Education, SAIC*  
*MFA University of Michigan 2008*
HOMAGO

HANG OUT!

MESS AROUND!

GEEK OUT!
WHAT IS HOMAGO?
*Hang Out! Mess Around! Geek Out!*

**HOMAGO IS A THEORY** grounded in exploratory learning. The theory was originally developed to explain how teens interact with new media, it has grown to encompass informal learning experiences where participants hang out, mess around and geek out.

Because **HOMAGO** is a really big idea, part of learning about how to make a **HOMAGO** space work meant defining what it was not. A traditional classroom teacher will notice that **HOMAGO** spaces do not have the typical measurable, observable objectives and teacher-scheduled sequential activities. It is not teacher-led. We were both professionally trained classroom art teachers, so we struggled to find the vocabulary to describe what we were doing, but a series of discoveries propelled us forward, even when we felt lost in the dark.

The critical turning point in our understanding of **HOMAGO** began when we reflected on adultism and started think more critically about youth creative capacity in the context of art education. We were seeing young people engage in productive art making activities while they were on their
phones, chatting with friends, playing music, looking up things online, and we had to confront our own biases of what productive young people looked like. With that, HOMAGO Open Studio went from feeling chaotic to looking like a studio full of hard working and happy young artists. We started to observe patterns and create connections to what we already valued in traditional classrooms, including differentiated instruction, universal access, student-centered and inquiry-based learning, and light bulbs began to go on. Most of all, it was so exciting to be a space in which teens learn to create their own path to pursue their artistic goals, in partnership with an adult mentor.

The following guidelines can be used to define teen-centered spaces and studio practice and explain the rationale for such spaces. There are also descriptions of our target audience, the best qualities we observed in a teaching-artist, as well as administration's role in supporting and promoting a successful HOMAGO space.

A HOMAGO SPACE IS
- organic
- intergenerational
- collaborative
- experimental
- process-oriented
- safe
- social
- participatory
- empowering
- individualized
- fun
- caring
- stress-free

A HOMAGO SPACE IS NOT
- static
- adult oriented
- solitary
- concrete or fixed
- formal schooling
- home
- adultist
- teacher-proof
- limiting
- boring
WHAT IS A STUDIO PRACTICE ...  
... and Why Do Artists & Creatives Need Open Studio?

ARTISTS EXPLORE AND MANIFEST their aesthetic and philosophical interpretations of their world through studio practice, and it is essential that the individual define their own practice and creative process. For example, some artists never work in the same media twice, while another is a comic artist. One’s studio practice might be ritualistic, repetitive, experimental collaborative, individual, instantaneous, labor intensive, material or conceptual. The path to discover your own practice and to make the work that eventually defines your practice takes time, and young people are not given opportunities for this self-directed creative exploration. Sometimes you make the work, but you need to practice, too. Sometimes you are doing layups and drills, to use a basketball metaphor, and practice is your only hope of making it to the playoffs. Open studios broaden a studio practice by fostering a communal practice of reflection and making.

Open studio mentors can support young people in the transition from teacher-directed art making to teens pursuing their own growth based on personal interests. They can ask
questions, discover what they want to pursue, and make it happen in a community-like environment. When they find out about an exciting new artist, or they learn a new techniques, it might be from a peer or an adult mentor, and they can then pass it on to others. Peers are one of the most important sources of information in a teen’s life, and open studios invite this!

AN OPEN STUDIO PRACTICE IS

- independant and/or collaborative
- individually defined • learned
- experimental • over-time self directed
- observing as action • a place that inspires you to make • a relaxing place where you can make ideas manifest • where ideas are born and made manifest • where peers and professionals can come to experience your ideas
WHO ARE OPEN STUDIO PEOPLE ... ... and What Do They Do?

Anyone can participate in a HOMAGO open studio! That is the best part, but for our case and to help you create your own we have made three categories of people: the mentor (which in our case was the lead artist in residence), the youth and the administration of Yollocalli.

THE YOUTH

curious • looking for something to stay busy • wanting to be ‘cool’ eager to experiment

The largest group of participants in open studio are youth. Participants apply and might be recommended or recruited by their art teachers or by other community arts programs. Some hear about it from friends on social media or in school. Many people are there because they are motivated to pursue ideas, try new things, make things in a dynamic environment. Some might be serious about pursuing an art career, and others might be simply curious about a teaching artists or something else they see people doing.

Young people will only come because they want to be
there, and they feel welcome. They know when they arrive that they will have the freedom to explore their ideas and to do so at their own pace.

**THE MENTOR** *(or teaching artist in residence)*

*expert • listener • resourceful • aware of negative stereotypes of youth • caring • shares resources • asks challenging questions has high expectations • valuing their experience • values the youths ideas • opens doors*

The mentor is an expert resource who supports the youth in their pursuit of interests and creative as well as personal growth. The relationship between the adult mentor and the teens is the strongest factor that determines student engagement and participation in an open studio. The mentor should have an understanding of adultism by unlearning harmful and pervasive negative stereotypes of youth. It takes time to get to know and trust people, and this is a challenge between adults and teens. A sense of humor, resourcefulness, and listening skills are essential. The best mentors have astronomically high expectations and endless patience!

Mentors should seize upon the opportunity to share art references, websites, a good source of materials, or to share a technique. At the same time, the teaching artist
should contain their excitement and not dominate the younger person with their own ideas or instructions. Asking questions, listening to the answers and valuing youth ideas are at the core of the relationship between teaching artists and the teens in an open studio setting.

Mentors and teaching artists become trusted and influential people in the lives of teens and they have the opportunity to open doors for them. But it is a lot of work and responsibility, so it is important that time is allotted for mentors to acknowledge their successes, discuss difficulties, ask questions, reflect and problem solve with other youth mentors and supportive administrators.

THE ADMINISTRATION & ORGANIZATION

The administration of the larger organization is responsible for the success of a HOMAGO program and the support of the mentors, but all adults involved in the space, from security to volunteers to maintenance people, should be aware of the objectives of the program, and how it differs from a typical class. Safety and creative exploration should be at the top of this list of priorities. This may also mean that adults in the space where teens are working need to learn to tolerate the
music teens want to hear. How this is approached will be different for every organization.

ALL OPEN STUDIO PARTICIPANTS SHARE THE FOLLOWING QUALITIES:

- are trans-generational: makers/young and old
- have various levels of engagement and experience
- can be artists, uncommitted geniuses, thinkers and talkers, curious people and friends of curious people
- creative nomads
HOW DOES AN ORGANIZATION SUPPORT A PROGRAM ...

... With A Mentor?

WHEN WE IMAGINED A PLACE where youth would want to be, we imagined a consistently inviting place that was inclusive to a range of youth cultural expressions. This does not look the same for everyone, and it might mean working toward an entirely new organizational culture of inclusion for teen expression. In the case of Yollocalli, we achieved our goal by making key conceptual shifts and by adding a teen leadership council.

Because the mentor plays such a crucial role in a HOMAGO open studio it is up to the administrators to provide all the necessary resources, guidance and support to the mentors and participating youth. Administrators and experts should check in with teaching artists to see if they need support, and they should participate in presentations, workshops, and exhibitions when possible. Administrators need to create a culture of reflection by being present and participating in studio sessions.

The mentor/artist in residence must work harder to reach out to youth directly and create a relationship that retains the
youth as participants of the program. Think of the phrase: if you will build it they will come.

SUPPORTING A PROGRAM WITH A MENTOR REQUIRES:

- lead HOMAGO orientations
- build in time for formal and informal conversations
- encourage supportive peer learning community for mentors
- observations and participation in program events
- support for visiting artists, exhibition, field trips
- keep a low ratio of youth to adults (10:1 or less)
- maintain an orderly space that is conducive to intense creativity
- create dynamic publicity for exhibitions
- communicate with families, schools and the community
THE VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE WORKINGS OF
... a HOMAGO Open Studio

HOMAGO AS A THIRD SPACE

THIRD SPACE IS A CONCEPT we borrowed from Ray Oldenberg, and it’s described as a necessary neutral space beyond school and home (or work and home) where people develop social bonds and live social lives. Think of the program “Cheers,” or the gym, the basketball court, the cafe, or the library, or the row of little old men sitting on the bench in the park on Saturday. Where do teens experience third space?

This looked like what we hoped to create in an open studio environment: an unpretentious low-profile place with regular participants, an accessible and accommodating place where conversation and play are central activities. It is a level playing field without requirements or prerequisites. The space would be defined by the needs of its participants. This makes is really hard to define because it will be different for each organization and each group of teens.

The youth, mentor and administration create a vibrant and exciting learning experience for everyone! It’s quite simple
and as we read we are probably nodding in agreement with what we have here because we experience that space all the time. We all have thirdspaces, places beyond school and home, or work and home, where people develop social bonds and social lives. Our organizations and especially open studios are thirdspaces for youth!

**VISIBLE WORKINGS OF A HOMAGO OPEN STUDIO**

- inviting and social space • use sign in sheets & docs to suit your needs and the artist in residence • focus on process & studio practice • informal and formal demonstrations • materials and equipment are accessible • youth can drop in and bring friends to hang out with them • scheduled artist show & tells and presentations posted • welcoming

**INVISIBLE WORKINGS OF A HOMAGO OPEN STUDIO**

- low youth/adult ratio • building trusting relationships • share ideas and interests organically • talking • listening reflecting
INFORMATION MANAGEMENT, DOCUMENTATION AND EVALUATION

WHEN YOU GO TO a really good party, there are usually very few pictures of it because people were having a good time, not taking pictures. Terrific youth programs are just like a good party, when they are going well. In other words, engaged people are not observers, and the administrators and other support staff should document something every day. Audio, video, photos, as long as the records you produce are not only of major events. Typically, you see documentation of just the last day, which does nothing to show how you got there.

Documentation can be a part of the creative process depending on the field the open studio is taking place. Documenting should feel natural and everyone in a HOMAGO space can participate in making and gathering documentation. From Facebook shares to tumblr pages, collaborative drawings and written rants are all a part of a communal creative process and they all form a part of documentation.

Involve students in taking pictures! They are probably doing it already, and it might be their artwork. It might
become a blog. The blog could be the exhibit. In any case, it should be a natural part of the process for participants.

Use hashtags, link instagrmas, use instant mobile uploads, and put all the links shared in class where people can find them. This is information management, and this task can be shared by administrators, teens, and mentors.
AN IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT ...

... Safety and Fun

AN IMPORTANT PART of feeling open to create and explore is feeling safe. Safety can mean more than physical safety, and there are often invisible conflicts a teen is experiencing that they need help with. They may or may not be able to bring this to the mentor. Making a safe environment for all teens means going beyond enforcing an anti-bias environment. It means creating plenty of opportunities for feedback from the young people throughout the duration of the program. How do you know if this is happening or not? Ask them. Teens should know several adults that they can consult with, without judgment. Ensuring that teens can openly share feedback throughout the program is an important role for the administrators.
CONCLUSION

WE STARTED BY EXPLORING and we are still exploring. HOMAGO spaces can be implemented anywhere, youth organizations, public libraries, artist studios, even our grandmother’s basement. The key to a successful HOMAGO studio spaces is a mutual understanding from all participants that this space is an opportunity to explore and is a collaborative learning experience where everyone is a student and a teacher. As you begin to think about your own organization and your youth, consider first observing where HOMAGO might be taking place already. You may have been experiencing it all along. Start small, join the youth who hang out on the stairs and build from there. Remember to rejoice in the organic and spontaneous qualities of HOMAGO, live it up and enjoy!

ONLINE RESOURCES

NUA: newurbanarts.org
You Media: youmediachicago.org
Yollocalli Arts Reach: yollocalli.org
Art Education Professional Development: nicolemarroquin.com
ONLINE RESOURCES Cont.

Adultism Resources: freechild.org
Hive Chicago: hivelearningnetwork.org

KEYWORDS

collaboration, collaborative • hang out • mess around
gEEK OUT • tips/feedback • cool adult/street cred • drop in experimental making • creative support • new media traditional media like you’ve never seen it • exciting • cool free • youth • access to resources • connections • fun conversations • comfortable • autonomy • non judgemental space • choice based • open • sharing ideas • media making mentoring • risk taking • safe • nurturing without coddling aesthetics • mentoring • risk taking • safe • nurturing without coddling • aesthetics

CREDITS

Yollocalli Arts Reach

Yollocalli Arts Reach started in 1997, with the intention to address the educational needs of young people in the Pilsen community, to create opportunities for young artists to explore interests and uncover their artistic talents while
Over the past 15 years Yollocalli has grown into a platform where youth can learn from emerging artists, collaborate with them in their art making practices as well as become active members of Chicago’s growing creative community.

A special thank you to hive Chicago for supporting this project, and a very special thank you to Christian Greer.