

The University of the Arts

The College of Art and Design

The Graduate Program in Art Education

STREET SMARTS: FUSING MEDIA ARTS AND ART EDUCATION
TO REENGAGE OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH

by

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how media and arts education can be used to reengage out-of-school youth. Through on-camera interviews with youth, alternative-education faculty, and teaching artists, the goal was to reveal how media arts facilitate recruiting and retaining young people. This study found that media arts can help to retain students by teaching young people the tools to build positive relationships with their instructors, their peers, and their community at large. Results of the study report that media arts is engaging to young people when they learn new and unique skills that help them further their education, and by promoting self-expression, self-discovery, and self-confidence.

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Taylor Frome & Yesphilly family

My students whom I love

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CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

I'm tired of you dropouts. I'm tired of you good for nothing, sleeping on your baby mama's couch, baggy jean below your knees wearing, with the tattoos on your face and gut, illiterate, backwards reading, backwards writing, manipulative, conniving, stealing my tax dollars, having babies back to back, holding up the bus with their strollers, cellphone texting, fresh weave wearing, Newport smoking, YouTube watching, status updating every three to five minutes, with misspelled words, bragging about what you ain't doing, weed smoking, weed toting, red top selling, nickel and dime gangstas, with their free mixtapes for sale on the subway, Little Wayne and Nikki Minaj loud on repeat, Chinese chicken eating, corner store hugging, sorry excuses for human beings. Dropout. What the heck is a dropout besides a quitting waste of space?

-YESPhilly, Voice of Philly,

PhillyCAM. (2011). *Pushouts*. [Student film]. USA

A. Background

They are the forgotten. They are the millions of young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who do not work or go to school. They come up in theoretical conversations about dropout prevention or even the dropout crisis, but very few scholars discuss the future of young people who disengage from school. The Civic Enterprises study *Economic Value of Opportunity Youth* (Belfield, Levin, & Rosen, 2012) found that an estimated one in six of the 38.9 million youth ages 16 to 25 are

currently “opportunity youth.” The study defined “opportunity youth” as youth who have dropped out of high school or college and have been unable to find work; they may have been involved in the criminal-justice system, may have mental or health conditions that have inhibited their activities, or may have care-giving responsibilities in their families.

This group is disproportionately male and from minority groups, but substantial rates are found for all youth groups. For this researcher, statistics about out-of-school, opportunity youth elicit far more questions than answers. If millions of students leave school each year, where do they go? What do they do? Is there anything that can be done to reengage them? Is it worth investing time, money, and energy into students that are disconnected?

B. Statement of the Problem

Given the individual and societal problems associated with dropping out of high school, there is a critical need to reengage the thousands of youth who drop out of high school every year in the United States.

C. Research Question

How can media arts be used to reengage out-of-school youth?

D. General Significance and Personal Interest

According to some researchers, the dropout situation in America is not hopeless. Many believe that a simple solution to the current state of out-of-school youth is to develop reengagement strategies. For example, Desmond Brown,

consultant to the Center for American Progress Action Fund's Half in Ten anti-poverty project argues that the development of reengagement strategies will economically benefit both the youth and the United States. Brown recommends a comprehensive plan that reconnects those who are disengaged from their communities and families, while expanding employment opportunities for youth and youth workers (Brown, 2011, p. 1).

Youth who face the greatest risk as a result of dropping out of high school are the topic of the book *Art, Culture, and Ethnicity*, in which Vesta Daniel (Young 1990), an Ohio State University researcher, imagines a world where art and technology reconnect youth to services that fit their needs. Her argument is that a marriage of art and out-of-school youth will support cultural development and world-making (p. 83). As a result of working with out-of-school youth for the last seven years, this researcher agrees, believing that funding and momentum need to be allocated to develop curriculum and programming that fuse media, technology, and character development for the sake of reengaging disconnected youth. There is a critical need to reengage the thousands of youth who drop out of high school every year in the United States. This thesis seeks to answer the question of how media arts and technology can make a difference.

For the last nine years via Positive Minds, an organization that this researcher began as an undergraduate student at the University of the Arts, she has worked with urban youth using media arts as a tool for personal expression and social change. Positive Minds and its instructors have been featured in several publications

(*Philadelphia Inquirer*, *South Philly Review*) and conferences (National Association for Media Literacy Education, Best In Campus Solutions) for an out-of-the-box approach to media arts engagement and support.

Through her work with Positive Minds, this researcher was introduced to an organization called YESPhilly. YESPhilly is the only accelerated high school and GED program in Philadelphia that has a focus on media arts integration. She has worked with YESPhilly for the last five years to better understand how combining media arts and academic works could reengage out-of-school youth. YESPhilly's mission is to create a program where youth who have dropped out of school can discover artistic talents and dreams while developing academic and job-related skills, earning General Education Diplomas (GEDs), and starting college or careers.

E. Definition of Terms

1. **dropout:** a young person between the ages of 16-24 person who has left school and disconnected from society to pursue an alternative lifestyle.
2. **out-of-school youth (OSY):** males and females between 13-24 years old who are not enrolled in high school, not employed and not in higher education.
3. **teenage male of color:** males between the age of 13-19 who are not Caucasian. The term is meant to be inclusive of all non-white groups.
4. **media arts:** an activity that requires participants to critically engage with new and traditional media forms, symbol systems, tools, and/or technologies for the purposes of innovating, problem-solving, and/or self-expression ie. graphic design, video production, audio production, multimedia

5. **media literacy:** the ability to access, evaluate, and communicate information in a variety of forms, including print and non-print messages.
6. **reengage:** methods used to support students who have dropped out with returning and completing their high school and post-secondary education.
7. **Positive Minds:** a youth-focused organization that uses media arts and technology as community-building tools by teaching youth on the streets of their neighborhood how to use media to highlight their community benefits and deceptions.
8. **YESPhilly:** an organization where youth who have dropped out of school can discover artistic talents and dreams while developing academic and job-related skills, earning GEDs, and starting college or careers.
9. **youth-engagement strategy:** a comprehensive plan to support at-risk teens, reconnect those who are disconnected from their communities and families, and expand employment opportunities for young workers.
10. **at-risk youth:** a young person who, by virtue of his/her circumstances, is statistically more likely than others to fail academically.

F. Limitations of the Study

This study is not focused on the causes of the current high school dropout rate. Nor will it solely speak to the ways that art can be used to reengage out-of-school youth, but instead will concentrate specifically on media arts as tools for reengagement. This study is limited by time. This study will not determine the long-

term effects of media arts on out-of-school youth. The study is also affected by the varying definitions of media arts and reengagement.

The qualitative research method was used because it helped to humanize the research, advantageously considering that the main subjects of the study are young and often at-risk youth. Qualitative data were collected through on-camera interviews and focus groups. Qualitative research was used to get the story behind the subject's experience. The field study consisted of interacting with the faculty and students at YESPhilly in an effort to understand more generally YESPhilly is an accelerated high school and GED program. The study was done to make generalizations about the wider population of disconnected youth. The ethnography allowed the researcher to observe and document the culture and systems of YESPhilly --especially in terms of the art and media literacy. The population studied was males and females between the ages of 16-21 living in urban Philadelphia. Students' reading and math levels were gathered from the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) and academic report cards. Students attendance records were gathered from YESPhilly database, Powerschool. The group was a mixed gender, mixed academic blend of current YESPhilly students.

It was anticipated from the review of literature that out-of-school youth may be challenging to interview. While out-of-school youth have been labeled as problematic to society, this researcher found them very easy to work with. This research proposed that funding and support be allocated to encourage work that integrates media literacy and art education to reengage out-of-school youth. It was hypothesized that if character-development-infused media arts were integrated into

the curriculum, then out-of-school youth would increase their positive community engagement, academic success, and healthy citizenship.

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

The following literature review explores the definition and demographics of out-of-school youth in the United States. While investigating the reasons why youth drop out, the research also highlights the implications of dropping out on both individuals and society. After highlighting research on out-of-school youth, the review looks at organizations, specifically YESPhilly, and the methods that they use to reengage out-of-school youth. Finally the review explores the meanings of reenagement and shares research on reengagement strategies. Several authors have noted ways that arts can be used to support at-risk youth, but this author has not found any literature that specifically reviews how media arts can be used to reengage out-of-school youth.

What is an-out-school youth?

Over the last few years there has been an abundance of research on the dropout crisis in the United States. Much of this research has focused on the question, Who are out-of-school youth? With so much research on out-of-school youth, it may seem obvious. Many would agree that an out-of-school youth, or a dropout, is someone who leaves or fails out of high school, but the definition becomes more complicated depending on what the former student opts to do instead of attending school. This leads to several conflicting ideas about who is classified as an out-of-school youth. In a 2011 National Public Radio article, “Why Dropout Data Can Be So Unreliable,” former elementary and middle school teacher Claudio Sanchez (2011), who is currently the Education Correspondent for NPR, wrote:

Accurate out-of-school youth figures are very hard to find because most states don't adequately collect or analyze the data. Part of the problem is that every state has a different definition for dropout. In some states, for example, students who leave school aren't counted as having dropped out if they enroll in adult education classes like night school. Many schools don't count kids as out-of-school youth if they enroll in a GED program. The U.S. Department of Education says GED recipients should be counted as out-of-school youth, but that rule isn't uniformly applied. And then there are students who did drop out but aren't counted because they go to prison. Very few school districts count kids who are incarcerated even in juvenile justice facilities in dropout statistics. Some schools don't think they should be held responsible if a kid quits school and gets in trouble with the law. (p. 1)

Although this researcher refrains from identifying out-of-school youth as dropouts, many researchers use the term “dropout” to identify this group. An in-depth investigation of the term dropout challenges audiences to think about dropping out from three perspectives, argues University of California Santa Barbara professor, Dr. Russell Rumberger. As founder of the California Dropout Research Project, Rumberger has published widely in several areas of education: education and work, the schooling of disadvantaged students, school effectiveness, and education policy. He has been conducting research on out-of-school youth for the past 25 years and has written over 40 research papers and essays on the topic such as *Dropout Prevention: A Practice Guide* and *Improving Measures of High School Dropout, Graduation, and Completion Rates: Better Data, Better Measures, Better Decisions*. In his most

recent book, *Dropping Out: Why Students Drop Out of School and What Can Be Done About It*, Rumberger (2011) encourages researches to consider dropping out from varying perspectives:

1) Dropping out can be referred to as a status or current situation. When using out-of-school youth to mean status, it reveals how many individuals at some point are dropouts and whether that status is more prevalent in some groups male or females; Asians, blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, or whites. 2) When using dropping out as an event, it reveals how many individuals over a particular time or a particular grade level, quit school before graduating. Dropping out as an event can be formal--well documented, or informal--just stopped attending. 3) When defining dropout as a process, it “reveals what types of attitudes, behaviors, and school performance indicators precede the decision to quit school and when they occur providing guidance for developing intervention strategies (p. 48).

For many, including this researcher, the term dropout is problematic. Recently Youth United for Change, a youth organization acting on its own behalf to improve the quality of public education, facilitated a participatory action research project on the dropout crisis in Philadelphia. In their report they note:

The term dropout points the finger at the individual in a negative way. The term dropout suggests that people leave school because of individual mistakes and poor decisions; the term neglects the larger, systemic problems that lead to young people leaving school. We choose the term pushout because it focuses on the school-based factors that lead to young people leaving school.

For example, if a student is new to a school district and is unable to transfer credit from his old district, he may find himself with limited educational options and unable to acquire enough credits to graduate. (*Youth United for Change*, 2011, p. 2)

This researcher identifies young people who have dropped out as out-of-school youth for clarity and respect.

Demographics of out-of-school youth

There are several research findings on the demographics of out-of-school youth. The 2005 study *Unfulfilled Promise: The Dimensions and Characteristics of Philadelphia's Dropout Crisis*, by Robert Balfanz, research professor at the Center for the Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University School of Education, revealed that youth who drop out are overwhelmingly African-American and Latino and suggested that advocacy be focused on the out-of-school youth population in a major way across the United States (Balfanz & Curran, 2007).

Since the findings of the *Unfulfilled Promise* study, the number of students leaving or being pushed out of high school has dropped. The *Philadelphia Public School Notebook* reported in a 2013 article, "District On-time Graduation Rate Surpasses 60 Percent," that of the class of students that started ninth grade in 2005 and [were] slated to graduate in 2009, the graduation rate of 56 percent after four years grew to 61 percent by 2011 (Socular, 2013).

Though news of increased student success is inspiring, it also helps to highlight the four-year graduation rates for African-American and Latino males, which remains at 45% and 43%, respectively (The African-American and Latino

Male Dropout Taskforce Report, 2010). These numbers are in alignment with an amalgamation of other issues affecting young males of color. The statistics around teenage males of color are staggering, and the plight appears quite bleak. In a 2009 article in the Education Section of the *Huffington Post*, “Save Our Sons,” by Dr. Matthew Lynch (2009), Dean of the School of Education, Psychology, and Interdisciplinary Studies, and an Associate Professor of Education at Virginia Union University, stated, “We have a serious problem in this country and it is one that is not getting nearly the amount of attention that it deserves. Black males are slipping through the cracks in large numbers in the country (p. 1).” The reality is so terrifying that African-American teenage males are now being referred to by scholars as an endangered species in crisis (Laing, 2010, p. 213).

Researchers have found that men of color who drop out, or are pushed out of school, enter the prison system at an alarming rate. The United States Department of Justice statistics (2007) reported that in 2006 the number of inmates in state and federal prisons increased to over one and a half million from 2005. Thirty-five percent of state and federal male prisoners were African-American even though African Americans constituted only 12.4% of the United States’ population in 2006 (Blake, Darenbourg, & Perez, 2010). A similar report found that at the end of 2000, an estimated 791,600 Black men were behind bars while 603,032 were enrolled in colleges or universities. By contrast, in 1980--before the prison boom--Black men in college outnumbered black men behind bars by a ratio of more than three to one (Laing, 2010, p. 211).

Lynch asked that the school-to-prison pipeline theory be examined from the perspective of the sheer number of young Black males who are not graduating from high school in the United States. He supported his claim by using the example of Rochester Public School District in New York:

According to a study by the Schott Foundation for Public Education, the Rochester City School District ranked last for graduating the lowest percentage of black male students in the nation. The study looked at districts that enrolled 10,000 or more black male students. In 2006, there were a total of 1,208 black males enrolled in the 9th grade at RCSD high schools. By the time those students were in 10th grade, 173 students dropped out or left the district. By the time the remaining 1,035 students reached 11th grade, there were only 543 black male students from that class--a net loss of 492 students. In all, only 108 (nine percent) of the 1,208 black male students who enrolled in 2006 graduated on time, four years later with Regents or Advance Regents diplomas. (Lynch, 2012, p. 1)

Reasons youth drop out

There is no *one* reason why youth drop out. In 2011, Youth United for Change's Pushout Chapter, a group of out-of-school youth, researched the reasons youth decide to leave school. A team of youth researchers surveyed 273 of their peers. Early in their research they realized that 89% of their survey participants identified more than one reason for leaving school (p. 8). The four primary themes that students surveyed stated as their reason for leaving school were: 1) boredom and

lack of engagement, 2) lack of classroom learning, 3) discipline and climate, and 4) out-of-school issues (Youth United for Change, 2011, p. 3).

Likewise, Robert Balfanz (2007) in his report, *What Your Community Can Do to End Its Dropout Crisis: Learnings from Research and Practice*, categorized reasons for dropping out into four categories. He identifies:

1) Life Events--Students who drop out because of something that happens outside of school-- they become pregnant, get arrested or have to work to support members of their family; 2) Fade Outs--Students who have generally been promoted on time from grade to grade and may even have above grade level skills but at some point become frustrated or bored and stop seeing a reason for coming to school. Once they reach the legal dropout age they leave, convinced that they can find their way without a high school diploma or that a GED will serve them just as well; 3) Push Outs--Students who are or who are perceived to be difficult, dangerous or detrimental to the success of the school and are subtly or not so subtly encouraged to withdraw from the school, transfer to another school, or are simply dropped from the rolls if they fail too many courses or miss too many days of school and are past (or in some cases not even past) the legal dropout age; 4) Failing to Succeed--Students who fail to succeed in school and attend schools that fail to provide them with the environments and supports they need to succeed. For some, initial failure is the result of poor academic preparation, for others, it is rooted in unmet social-emotional needs. Few students drop out after their initial experience with failure. In fact, most persist for years, only dropping out after they fall so

far behind that success seems impossible or they are worn down by repeated failure. In the meantime, they are literally waving their hands saying “help” through poor attendance, acting out and/or course failure. (p. 3)

Balfanz argues that, “communities need a good estimate of how much of their dropout crisis is driven by each [reason], as each requires substantially different prevention, intervention and recovery actions” (2007, p.3). Balfanz’s findings support the recommendation that research on out-of-school youth increases stakeholders’ ability to predict when a student will decide to stop going to school. The ability to make accurate predictions will decrease the numbers of out-of-school youth substantially.

Implications of being out-of-school

Researchers question whether there are moral, social, and/or economic consequences for dropping out and/or being pushed out of school (Sum, Khatiwada, & McLaughlin, 2009, p. 6). In 2009 the Center for Labor Market Studies released a report on the implications of the nation’s dropout crisis. The study, *Left Behind in America* (2009), outlined the long-term consequences of being an out-of-school youth. This study focused on the financial effect that being an out-of-school youth has on the average individual as well as the way that out-of-school youth affect society.

Americans without a high school diploma have considerably lower earning power and job opportunities in today’s workforce. Over a working lifetime from ages 18-64, high school out-of-school youth are estimated to earn \$400,000 less than those that graduated from high school. For males, the

lifetime earnings loss is nearly \$485,000 and exceeds \$500,000 in many large states. Due to their lower lifetime earnings and other sources of market incomes, out-of-school youth will contribute far less in federal, state, and local taxes than they will receive in cash benefits, in-kind transfers, and correctional costs. Over their lifetimes, this will impose a net fiscal burden on the rest of society (Northeastern University, 2009, p. 3).

Another group of researchers Center from the Labor Market Studies (2009) gathered the report, *The Consequences of Dropping Out of High School: Joblessness and Jail for High School Dropouts and the High Cost for Taxpayers*, that found that young people who drop out or were pushed out of school were nine times more likely to be single mothers than their college-aged peers, 63 times more likely to be incarcerated than young people with a bachelors degree, and four times more likely to be living below the 125% poverty line (Sum, et al., 2009, p. 6). Further implications may exist, but, because of a common disconnection from society, out-of-school youth are often a difficult population to include in research (McCaul, et al., 1992, p. 199).

Solutions for out-of-school youth

Several researchers have responded to the drop out crisis with solutions for to combat its effects. According to *Grad Nation: A Guidebook to Help Communities Tackle The Dropout Crisis* (2009), another report led by Balfanz, there is no quick and easy solution to the dropout crisis in the United States (Balfanz, Fox, Bridgeland, & McNaught, p. 15). However:

Attendance, behavior and course-performance (the ABCs of dropout prevention) are the first symptoms of trouble that we are able to influence, and we should concentrate our first efforts there. The measures to follow are those interventions and reforms that have proven to be successful. [The] most promising are efforts that combine more personalized education with enhanced academic supports and college and career ready curricula. (p. 15)

Unfulfilled Promise: The Dimensions and Characteristics of Philadelphia's Dropout Crisis (2008) report was the catalyst to launching Project U-Turn, “a citywide campaign to elevate the visibility of Philadelphia’s dropout crisis, and take steps to resolve it” (Project U-Turn, p. 2). Solutions that were implemented in Philadelphia as a result of the study were:

Creating [three] new accelerated high schools; placing dropout prevention specialists in seven high dropout high schools; and building a consensus to align the policy for parenting students with state timelines for child care availability. Additionally, new educational opportunities [were] offered for struggling students and out-of-school youth. (p. 2)

On another note, from the perspective of teachers’ voices gathered in the report by Civic Enterprises, *Raising Their Voices: Engaging Students, Teachers, and Parents to Help End the Dropout Epidemic* (2010):

Key reforms must be undertaken to make courses more interesting and relevant, to facilitate parental involvement, and to provide each group with the supports they need both inside and outside the classroom to foster more student success. All of the groups realized that their collective efforts on these

issues would be crucial if they want to increase the number of students who graduate from high school. They also understand that the health, economies, and civic vibrancy of our communities and nation depend on it. They are ready to listen to one another, to cooperate, and most importantly, to act (p. 28).

The Youth United for Change study *Pushed Out: Youth Voices on the Dropout Crisis in Philadelphia* (2011), asked out-of-school youth their recommendations on what would work to reengage students. Among many suggestions, key strategies were: 1) instituting experiential learning; 2) actively building positive relationships in school; 3) restorative justice practices; 4) professional development on dropout crisis; 5) providing additional educational and social supports to meet student needs; 6) participatory action research; 7) career and technical education; 8) alternative assessments; 9) student evaluations of teachers; 10) emotional and social supports; 11) recruit teachers from the neighborhood; 12) reduce class sizes; 13) design smaller schools; 12) financial incentives; 13) support groups for the special populations of at-risk youth; 14) increased parent involvement; 15) maintaining funding for alternative school (pp. 24-28).

Developing a national youth engagement strategy is a viable and necessary approach to expand economic opportunities and cut poverty in the United States. Policymakers should create a comprehensive plan to support at-risk teens, reconnect those who are disconnected from their communities and families, and expand employment opportunities for young workers. These strategies must focus on communities and youth who face the greatest risk and

are in danger of falling behind and permanently out of the mainstream economy. (Brown, 2011, p. 1)

Reengagement

There are several Philadelphia programs that work to reengage out-of-school youth. One reengagement organization, YESPhilly (formerly Youth Empowerment Services/YES), has been working with out-of-school youth since 1999. YESPhilly's (2013) mission is to:

Reengage young adults who have dropped out of school by providing education and support that help them get into college or get a job. Students at YESPhilly participate in media arts studios, and have counseling support. The organization is designed to challenge students to make key changes that put them on the path to success. Students take academic courses at their levels, including basic, GED and precollege classes. YESPhilly classes are small, and designed to be fast-paced and interesting. Media arts studio courses are a place to learn by doing, and tap into everyone's creativity. We give students a chance to develop their creativity as well as skills they'll need for college and careers. All students start with the Media Arts Sampler Course, and can then sign up for ongoing studio classes in Video and Sound Production, Graphic Design, or Mural and Fine Arts. Students create and edit videos, record and edit soundtracks, design multi-image graphic projects, and learn to draw and paint. YESPhilly's talented faculty and state-of-the-art studios can be the launching pad for media arts careers or a place to enjoy creating and expressing yourself. (para.1)

In 2003, YESPhilly received funding from the William Penn Foundation to develop *The Blueprint for Philadelphia's Out-of-School Youth (2003)*. The major results of the study stated:

We believed that while many local institutions provide some services to out-of-school youth, Philadelphia lacked a focused strategy for reaching this large population of highest-risk 14 to 21 year olds. In particular, we were concerned that: 1) Existing services were fragmented; 2) only a small percentage of out-of-school youth were reached; 3) services were most targeted to youth who are already motivated to succeed; 4) there was no comprehensive planning to address the different levels of need among youth, nor was there a forum in which to discuss this population's unique needs. (p. 1)

[We need] better ways to reach out-of-school youth. We need more creative outreach and more creative programs to reach youth who currently do not participate in existing programs. More risk-taking and—thinking-outside-the-box is needed to connect with—unreachable youth--those who would be unlikely to take the initiative to join a program. We need to learn more about where kids go every day, after they have dropped out. What are their social networks, hangouts, and communication modes? Stakeholders suggested that we need more youth doing front-line youth work, and that we need to tap individuals who already have long-term commitment to the community and are influential with youth. (p. 3)

YESPhilly students experience a special brand of media arts education.

YESPhilly media arts curricula fuse media literacy, art therapy, art education, and

project-based academic instruction to engage and re-connect youth who either drop out, or are pushed out, of traditional educational environments. The YESPhilly Media Arts & Technology Department provides media-based support and training for academic and life skills instruction. Through specialized services, instructors receive technical support, resources, and creative development. The goal is that instructors, through both workshops and one-on-one sessions, gain the knowledge to successfully execute academic learning. The goal is for all YESPhilly students and faculty to understand and value the interdependence of technology, media, arts, and education.

YESPhilly, Inc. is a student-driven after-school program and work experience for YESPhilly School and GED students between the ages of 16-21. At YESPhilly, Inc. dedicated students have the opportunity to develop their 21st century skills through activities that link media arts, business, and social action. Guided by the belief that media arts and entrepreneurship encourage students to practically apply their academic learning, YESPhilly, Inc. provides future media makers with the communication tools and theory that they need to flourish in post-secondary education and/or careers.

In addition to being introduced to industry standard equipment, software, and training, students work as a team to bring each other's ideas to life. Through a guided process, students develop the skills to successfully brainstorm ideas, delegate positions, design project proposals, and work according to a timeline. Once a week, all students convene to hear the progress of their peers. At the end of every eight-week cycle, participants present during a community-oriented culminating event. Participants who have attended at least 10 hours a week and complete a media

project, receive a 100 dollar stipend every cycle. Students work at YESPhilly, Inc. Monday through Friday from 3:30-5:30pm under the guidance of trained professionals. Most Fridays the group take work-related trips to local businesses and cultural organizations or receive motivation from guest presenters.

Media Arts

YESPhilly, like this researcher, defines media literacy based on the research of the former President of the YESPhilly Board of Directors, Dr. Renee Hobbs, the Founding Director of the Harrington School of Communication and Media. Hobbs defines media literacy in *The Seven Great Debates in the Media Literacy Movement* (2009) as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages (p. 16). Hobbs writes, “Media literacy education in the United States is actively focused on the instructional methods and pedagogy of media literacy, integrating theoretical and critical frameworks rising from constructivist learning theory, media studies, and cultural studies scholarship” (p. 1).

Hobbs (2010) argues in her book *Digital and Media Literacy* that media literacy is a tool that re-engages through curiosity, critical thinking, production, analysis, and distribution (p. vii).

Today full participation in contemporary culture requires not just consuming messages, but also creating and sharing them. To fulfill the promise of digital citizenship, Americans must acquire multimedia communication skills that include the ability to compose messages using language, graphic design, images, and sound, and know how to use these skills to engage in the civic life of their communities. These competencies must be developed in formal

educational settings, especially in K–12 and higher education, as well as informal settings. The inclusion of digital and media literacy in formal education can be a bridge across digital divides and cultural enclaves, a way to energize learners and make connections across subject areas, and a means for providing more equal opportunities in digital environments. (p.vii)

Practical application of Hobbs’ theories are outlined in a *College Composition and Communication* journal article by Steven Goodman (2003), “Teaching Youth Media: A Critical Guide to Literacy, Video Production, and Social Change.” The article highlights the work of Goodman, founder of Educational Video Center (EVC), in New York. Through the article he states how and why he started EVC and what his challenges have been with maintaining it. The article discusses the EVC curriculum and how it was designed to increase the ability for youth to “analyze, evaluate, and produce print, aural, and visual forms of communication” (p. 763). After critically analyzing the traditional school system, the article looked at how Goodman’s approach to education differs from that of traditional education. The article also referenced two case studies: *Cameras and Guns in the Streets: Teaching Critical Literacy in the Documentary Workshop*, which follows a student group as they create *Young Gunz*, a documentary about guns and violence. *Dreams and Nightmares: A Case Study of Video in a Classroom* followed a group researching teen suicide and revealed how EVC aims transform the classroom setting. (p. 764)

For other ways that media can be used to reengage and encourage students to transform the classroom setting, Hobbs (2009) argued that the future of media literacy lies in the ability for the field “to reach out, to learn from colleagues in other

fields, and to bridge the various disciplines by making critical connections necessary to enlarge the field” (p. 9). Hobbs recognized that as art educators begin to embrace technology, they might be unaware of some of the key questions that drive media literacy education and overlap with art education criticism. She referenced the *International Handbook of Research in Art Education*, stating that, “ultimately, it is arts educators who have a large role to play in helping children deal with the challenges of the digital world, [and that] education in digital literacy should be a central component of contemporary arts curricula” (p. 8).

Like media literacy educators and researchers, art educators have examined ways to address the plight of at-risk youth. In *Beyond Multicultural Art Education: International Perspectives* (1999), Doug Boughton and Rachel Mason edit together several articles that critically analyze multicultural art education from various international perspectives. The first chapter, *An African-American Perspective on Multicultural Art Education*, written by Dr. Bernard Young, “presents the African-American perspective on art education that argues for the inclusion of more Black arts and art educational theories and practices in the mainstream school curriculum” (p. 19). In addition to chapters that specifically discuss issues of race, ethnicity, and class, the book also offers chapters that speak to universal issues that may affect art and culture in the 21st century, such as technology.

Not only are art educators open to the idea of an integration of art and technology to support the specific needs of young Black males deemed at-risk, but art therapists also see the space for overlap. Stella Stepney’s book, *Art Therapy with Students At-Risk* (2001), is about the history of art therapy especially as it relates to

students deemed at-risk. Through the text she defines art therapy and at-risk to clarify her position. She then begins to explain the new paradigm of thinking around “reclaiming” students who are impacted by being categorized as at-risk. The book offers photographs, lesson plans, and strong theoretical arguments about art therapy both in and out of the traditional classroom environment.

Stepney notes that, “each encounter with an adolescent should be viewed as an opportunity to help the adolescent in his or her positive development and to lay the foundation for healthy functioning in adulthood” (p.xii). Stepney references Freedom Schools as an example of an alternative education movement that “represented innovation in terms of scale, informal ambience, and departure from bureaucratic rules and procedures” (2011, p. xii). Although Stepney has very few references to the ways that technology and art therapy can be intertwined to support the needs of young males of color, she does advocate for innovative models that seek to “reclaim” those deemed at-risk.

In contrast Jonathan Edmunds (2010) found from his research that the populations most likely to benefit from digital media in art therapy are children and adolescents who have suffered trauma or have behavior problems. “These clients that have behavioral issues may benefit from the structure that digital art making provides” (Edmunds n.p.). He calls these young people the “net generation” and comments on their experiences of being raised in a time of technology integration. He found that 75 percent of art therapists use technology in some form in their practice, while 18 percent use it for art-making specifically (p. 9). Technology-based art therapy techniques, as a channel for both visual and verbal communication, could

support young males of color by fusing with art education and media literacy to create a comprehensive approach to re-engagement.

This study was designed to answer the question of how media arts can be used to reengage youth who have dropped out of traditional public schools. It asks how we can reengage youth who have dropped out and whether media arts can be a tool for reengagement. It hypothesizes that customized media arts integrated curricula designed by teaching artists, media professionals, academic instructors, and students would increase community engagement and academic success for out-of-school youth.

CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY

"There are times we wish to know *not* how many or how well, but simply how" stated Lee Shulman in *Disciplines of Inquiry in Education: An Overview* (Shulman, 1988, p. 7). This research sought to investigate how media arts can be used to reengage youth who have dropped out of high school. The study utilized a qualitative strategy of collecting, and analyzing data to explore the research question. Qualitative research not only allowed participants to respond to broad questions, but also allowed this researcher to analyze the participants' responses based on common themes. YESPhilly was chosen as a focus of this research because it is the only accelerated high school and/or GED program in Philadelphia that attempts to use media arts as a tool for reengaging out-of-school youth. The results of this study can be used to create reengagement strategies for out-of-school youth.

In this study, semi-structured on-camera interviews and recorded focus groups were used to collect data on how media arts can be used to reengage youth. The qualitative research strategy was chosen to reflect the participants' individual views as well as the group's common themes. On-camera interviews were performed when research participants felt more comfortable speaking their answers as opposed to writing them. The interviews were conducted with youth who formerly identified themselves as high school dropouts.

Research was carried out with current YESPhilly youth ranging in ages from 16-24 years. It was imperative that YESPhilly youth participate in the study because they are the only recipients of varying forms of media arts education. A focus group

was conducted with YESPhilly faculty that included the executive director, education director, counselors, teachers, and media instructors.

Interview Design

This study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with all participants. The researcher prepared for the interviews by compiling several specific discussion points and by asking participants whether they felt more comfortable writing or speaking their responses on camera. One-on-one interviews took place in the school's central hub, the YESPhilly media arts lab. One-on-one interviews were chosen because they fit succinctly into the students school day. The space was chosen because it housed the production equipment and also was in alignment with the interview questions about media arts. The objective of the semi-structured interview was to better understand the interviewee's individual perspective. To meet this end, the interviewer asked predetermined, open-ended questions and also asked natural questions based on the interviewees' responses. "Open-ended questions are those questions that will solicit additional information from the participant. Sometimes called infinite response or unsaturated type questions, by definition, they are broad and require more than one or two word responses" (Richardson, nod, p.1). One of the limitations to this approach was the overwhelming range of responses--from the long and in depth to the short and insufficient.

Sampling

Both purposive and convenience sampling were used to choose interviewees. The purposive strategy allowed this researcher to select students who took, or take, media arts courses in addition to their academic subjects at YESPhilly.

The purposive sampling technique, also called judgment sampling, is the deliberate choice of an informant due to the qualities the informant possesses.

It is a nonrandom technique that does not need underlying theories or a set number of informants. Simply put, the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience. (Tongco, 2007, p. 147)

Permission was given by the YESPhilly Executive Director, Taylor Frome to interview students and faculty members. All participants who were asked, readily agreed to participate. It is assumed that participants were comfortable with the topic and happy to share their experiences with media arts education. All interviews contributed significantly to the study. Use of the camera helped participants speak freely about their experiences; however it caused self-awareness. Each interviewee was asked the same questions although follow up questions depended on their responses.

Focus Group Design

Research was gathered through audio-recorded, semi-structured focus group sessions. The focus group was a random sampling of YESPhilly faculty. Participants met for 40 minutes and responded to open-ended questions. A focus group was used because it offered an entirely different way of gathering information from the

participants. Unlike observations, which required waiting for something to happen, the focus group was easier to control and exposed individuals' beliefs, feelings, and questioning about both the research and researcher. Group interaction is one of the most important features of a focus group. Focus groups are similar to group interviews except in a group interview the focus is on questions and answers while focus groups facilitate interaction among the group with the support of a moderator (Gibbs, 1997). The limitations of the focus group were this researcher acting as the moderator to the session. The aim was to facilitate discussion without leading the discussion in any one direction. Another limitation was time, which limited the depth of the conversation.

Sampling

The focus group was a random sampling of YESPhilly faculty. The group was set up during the after-school hours in the cafeteria. Faculty were notified about the group and offered food for participating. The focus group members knew each other from school, which may have influenced their opinions. The focus group was audio recorded for further analysis of the group discussion, but video recording would have picked up on subtle physical nuances that audio-recording missed.

Audience

Youth participants for this study were between the ages of 16 to 24 years old and were selected from a population of 120 YESPhilly students. In 2013 YESPhilly became a part of the Philadelphia School District. Alternative schools in Philadelphia are a school option for students to get back on track and earn credits towards graduation in less than three years. According to the district website (2013),

Philadelphia operates 242 public schools with 3,631 students attending alternative schools like YESPhilly (para. 1). Most of the students in the Philadelphia School District are youth of color, as 87 percent of Philadelphia's school enrollment is minority, nearly two thirds of which are black students (CLASP, 2011, p. 1).

YESPhilly has a high number of African-American students (98%). Over 90% of the student body qualifies for free lunch and are classified as living below the poverty line, according to the Means Test Worksheet. Sixty percent of YESPhilly students are female and forty percent are male. In 2012 of the 190 students who attended YESPhilly, 24 completed with a GED. Other outcome measurements were employment, academic grade level gain, college enrollment, and job readiness completion (G. Paprocki, personal communication, November 3, 2013). On average, the numbers of the respondent group were members of the 30 YESPhilly, INC after school work experience.

Ethical Considerations

In accordance with the *Guidelines on Research Ethics for Projects with Children and Young People* (Shaw, Brady, & Davey 2011), when conducting research with youth, as was done in this study, the ethical considerations were basically the same as in other social and medical research (p. 28). The first consideration was consent. In the guidelines, the authors (2011) stated, "An integral part of gaining consent is ensuring that participants are fully informed of, and understand the nature, purpose and outcomes of the research." As recommended by the guidelines, all participants in this study received a brief cover letter explaining the

research. In addition, an intern explained the cover letter to each participant as she distributed the questionnaire, because as the guidelines stated:

Verbal discussion of the research project alongside the written material is also advocated. This could be through a class discussion, an assembly or group meeting. If the research is to be conducted outside such a setting, the researcher may wish to consider reading through the consent material with the child before commencing the project (Shaw, Brady, & Davey, 2011, p. 28).

The students who participated in the study were between the ages of 18-24 years-old. In addition to the students providing written consent, the program directors also provided consent for students and faculty to participate in the study. All student participants were required to complete a written consent form or have written consent provided by a guardian in addition to understanding that:

Potential participants also need to understand their rights to: refuse to participate without adverse consequences not answer specific questions without having to give a reason for withdrawing from the research at any point without adverse consequences. Participants should also be provided with: a contact telephone number for the researcher in case they have questions about the research details of your organization's complaints procedure. (Shaw, Brady, & Davey, 2011, p. 28)

Secondly this researcher had the ethical duty to protect all participants from any harm (Shaw, Brady, & Davey, 2011). In this study there was no chance that students would be over-researched or placed in a state of distress as a part of participating. The information in this study was not considered sensitive or potentially

painful to the participants. However, students were directed to see their school counselor if any parts of the study elicited anxiety or distress.

The last ethical consideration in this research was confidentiality. The limits to confidentiality were explained to participants who were a part of on-camera interviews and focus groups. Respondents were made aware of the fact that digitally collected material would remain confidential and would not be uploaded or shared on any online sites. The researcher transcribed all interviews. After the thesis is submitted the researcher will destroy all materials.

Limitations

The study consisted of several limitations. The sample size of students was 10% of the student body. With such a small sample size, it may be difficult to assess whether it is an accurate representation of the overall student population. Another considerable limitation was the lack of data that had been collected on media arts as way to reengage out-of-school youth. Because of this, it is difficult to reference any considerable trends in the ways that media arts are used to reengage youth in varying school environments. Lastly the self-reported data was viewed as a limitation. Information that was provided by participants could not be verified. Furthermore, the study relied on them accurately remembering their YESPhilly experience and its effects, if any, on their lives.

The researcher also possessed several limitations, one of those limits being access to faculty, students, documents, etc. YESPhilly, while very supportive, had a very structured day of activities for students, which did not make for easily being able to access participants for interviews, focus groups, etc. The time available to measure

the data was limited. In addition there was a bias in the researcher as a member of the YESPhilly faculty; there were relationships that were built prior to the study that may have hindered results.

CHAPTER FOUR ANALYSIS & RESULTS

The results of this study rendered three overarching themes in response to the research question of how can media arts be used to reengage out-of-school youth. Each of the three themes were gathered from the responses to interview questions, focus group responses, and researcher observations. The themes were supported by both direct quotations from the interviewees and focus group members, as well as observations by this researcher. The major themes were chosen because of the frequency at which the answers were repeated by varying sources.

The first major theme that emerged from the interviews was 1) the varying definitions of the term media arts, both from students and faculty members. This researcher realized that it would be difficult for participants to accurately participate in the study without knowledge of the main idea: therefore participants were asked to define media arts in their own words. This paper defines media art as an activity that requires participants to critically engage with new and traditional media forms, symbol systems, tools, and/or technologies for innovating, problem-solving, and/or self-expression.

Though all participants were aware that media arts existed at YESPhilly, no two definitions of term were shared. Students and faculty verbalized a range of responses, which were all related peripherally around the themes of using digital technology, having a vision and bringing it to life, and expressing oneself, while others included ideas that are less often associated with media arts such as service to others, social change, and performance art. While the majority of students attempted to answer the question, they often prefaced the answer with indecisive phrases or used

body language that implied a lack of confidence in their answer such as a long pause before responding and/or the hunching of their shoulders. Responses to the question included:

AR: “ Like photography and like video. I guess that [it] is another way to express yourself. A form of expression.”

TC: “When I hear media arts I think of computer and cameras but art with that stuff. Like a movie, a play, something like that.”

TT: “It’s a way to expand your creativity and open up and see things as outside of the box instead of as inside.”

B.H. “That’s a big question. I think of art. I think of different people doing different things to change different things. Media arts I think of art like painting, drawing, picking up trash off the floor like I don’t know.”

BJ: “Exquisite. Cause if you put both of them together you make a good scene or if you act it out or if you write it on pen and paper its still going to come out good.”

MS: “Media arts is basically being able to take an idea and put it on to paper, onto a screen or any type of media and getting it out to anywhere.”

TW: “Like a vision. I can’t really explain it. The way of people’s life. That’s what the arts is, like culture or something like that.”

JS: “Media is like drawing, painting and stuff like that. Because it brings kids together so they can do the things that they like to do.”

MS2: “Media arts to me is bringing out your words and visions to light. A form of expression.”

SM: “Video, studio production, fine art, and graphic design.”

CM(Faculty): “Well I haven’t had a lot of experiences with [media arts] as a teacher but the media arts aspect for the school program I would explain it as a way to incorporate curriculum with a media artist and help let the students tie in what they are learning in the classroom to a creative outlet so for my class I’ve had an audio teacher who would allow students to reflect on a text or reflect on something they are learning in a more creative way.”

In answering the question of how can media arts be used to reengage out-of-school youth, it is important to recognize that all of the young people in this study were able to identify a basic definition for the term media arts, although to different degrees of confidence and accuracy. This theme made it apparent that students and faculty are not getting a clear definition of how the program defines media arts. When out-of-school youth and/or their instructors do not have a common definition of media arts or lack confidence about their definition, opportunities are missed to reengage young people.

The second major theme that arose in the study was 2) that students saw their program as unique and interesting because it offered media arts in addition to traditional academic subjects. The study found that students who were interviewed saw media arts as an engaging part of the program because they had the opportunity to learn new skills. Examples were shown in several interviews. One young man

elegantly explained how media arts can reengage other students in a way that traditional academics may not:

AW: “[I would] show them attractions that the school [has] and show them and what the school is about, don’t show them that the school is just about learning. Show them that we do have a basketball team, that we do got mural arts, we got music class--audio production. Show them that we do go on field trips—positive field trips— like things that have to do stuff for the school. Cause if you just show a student school, a student gon’ think I’m going to school just to get my diploma and he gon’ think I’m gon’ get into the same trouble. But if I go to school and ... learn to do other things--he like music, alright I’m going to go to school for music things like that. Our [media arts] work program, INCs, our summer jobs, basketball, mural arts, and other stuff-- cause our [media arts] work program, back before the summer we learned about positive psychology so we went through various activities such as one activity -- “whatever you plant it will grow” -- which means if you plant bad stuff [in your mind] like if I wake up in the morning and plant like I am going to fight somebody then that it is what will be in your mind planted and that’s what you gon’ do, but if you wake up like I’m gonna pass my classes today, I’m gon’ stay out of trouble today, then that is what sticks in your mind all day. So that’s a big difference from my last school.”

TT: "I would say like I think media is a good way to recruit students because it *teaches them something new* that they can find a liking to and be able to take to new programs."

BJ: "Yeah [media] can be interesting cause it can help me out in the long term run. Say if somebody needed something and I was the only one who knew how to do it caused I learned it and it would come in handy to other people."

M.S: "I find interesting the media arts and the mural arts aspect because I have never experienced mural arts a day in my life until I came to YESPhilly. And as far as the media arts I am learning how to make logos and I am learning how to put things on t-shirts and being able to go into the media arts aspect of it instead of just hands-on stuff. So you know, *I am learning a lot*. I learned how to take designs that I think about in my head and able to put into a computer. Sometimes I can go to Microsoft Word or what's that other thing [Photoshop]. When I learned how to use those I learned I can take a picture of myself and enhance it to another thing and basically make my own designs when I like it, put it towards my tattoo business. I use it in that way but I technically I haven't really finished."

EP (faculty): "I think one of the things we've talked about that we haven't been able to do so far is really just videotaping a lot of what goes on and putting that into an orientation video so that kids are coming to the school with the understanding that YESPhilly is about

media and they get to see firsthand how we integrate that into the curriculum.”

Though 10 out of 12 of the student participants referenced technology as an engaging part of media arts, an interesting result of this study was finding out that students don’t just like media arts because they get to learn new skills or play with new technological toys. Half of the students and six faculty members referenced the students learning life skills, self-expression, and self-confidence through media arts. This study found that another way that media arts reengages out-of-school youth is that it allows students to use the tools to learn how to better themselves and better the world. One of the teaching artists stated:

KD (faculty): “One of my purposes is to inspire young people or people in general to improve themselves and then the world around them. And so [in] one of my classes during [the media arts work experience], my class which was called self-improvement, I expressed to them that I enjoy doing that even more so than video production because video production is just a tool to do that. Filmmaking is a talent that I connect to my purpose, but at the core of it is all about inspiring and encouraging people to improve other people and themselves. So even if you were to tear away the media arts, graphic design, video, fashion, and all that, students would still get that from [the media department] in some shape or form. So I think one of the things that makes the media arts program important to some *students is that they walk away inspired*. I often time use film, media, and

graphics to support what I am teaching them more than another teacher would because it is my background, it's one of my passions, what I went to school for, but at the end of the day I think one of the reasons students are drawn to the media arts program is because when they walk away, they leave feeling inspired."

TF (faculty): "I would like to see recruitment materials created that tell students stories of how [students] struggled and overcame obstacles so that when we are recruiting students they're hearing from their peers about, well, when I first came in, I didn't think I was going to be able to do this, and now I've done it. You know where they are, so that it's coming directly that way we are using that as a primary recruitment tool [and] also [for] retention because I think we could build into that a little bit about how this was hard, [and] I had to work."

MS2: "We did a documentary on high school dropouts, now referring to as pushouts. I thought it was interesting because it was a project mainly done by students with amazing mentors. We got to tell our stories and change the stereotypes."

AR (faculty): "I really enjoyed the play that the students did in media arts and that they got the opportunity to showcase themselves in a very different way. I mean AT is such a phenomenal thespian; he just had it in him and probably didn't know it."

JC (faculty): "Yes, that makes me think about QH, who was this quiet cool kid in the corner, and totally never missed a rehearsal, totally

dedicated, and *every time we ask him something that he's done here that he thought was great he talks about being this actor*. I think that is always really cool.

CM (faculty): "In the classroom we were having a circle on Wednesday and QH is leading it and they had to put in topics that they wanted to talk about and I would have never thought he [would] put in acting. He wanted to talk about you know the roles we play in school versus you know taking on roles in our lives that are extra. You know like he wants to do it as a career. That's cool. He's going to lead a whole talk; he was never that person before."

AW: "Some people don't express their feelings [so they] express the way they are feeling through drugs. [But] media arts is cool if you want to be positive and you want to change your life around and do what you need to do to get yourself out there or do what you need to do to be positive. [You should] be in media arts cause that's where you will express yourself. Yes, alright for example there is this person on my block and he looks like he is homeless, but every morning I go to school, I always say the mind is like a fertile garden, whatever you plant will grow, so he will plant that in my head, oh you not gon' be this you, you not gon' to be that,' so I block him out with my thoughts, saying I'm gonna be this and I'm going to be that. That's how I express myself."

JS: “[Media arts] made me be more creative in my classes and bring out things [about myself] and talk to people more.”

EP (Faculty): “I don’t know if somebody said this already but I think we tell the students a lot that their voice matters and I think that by using media we give them the ability to see that their voice actually does matter and that it is strong like all those things that we tell them they see it in the art form.”

Although many students referenced media arts as a positive part of their school experience, twelve out of twelve of the students who participated in the study referenced building positive relationships as one of the main reasons that they were able to reengage into school. Based on the results of the study, even more important than a strong media program, out-of-school youth need additional opportunities to build authentic bonds with their instructors and peers. Students, teaching artists, and academic faculty recognized the need for a strong sense of community within the media arts program-and in the entire school:

TS (Faculty): “I think that one of the most powerful things that I’ve seen is what I am seeing in the afternoon [during the media program] ...that *it* is really a big community builder and specifically when students gravitate towards common entrance, and that’s pretty great to see you know? It’s positive connections, and I see it spill over into the classrooms. It’s a nice connection that they have.”

AW: “[My relationship with my media instructor] is cool. Respectable. He understands where we come from as young adults.”

MS: “[Instructors need to tell students to] keep their heads straight. Tell them that you care about them every day because the teachers already do that as it is. So just remind them every morning even if they are having a bad day and they just feel like ‘oh I can’t do this today.’ Just let them know you can do this today. And you want to know why? Cause I got your back and I am right there with you and whatever you are going through, you can talk to me about it and then we can help you get your work done. Stay over top of their head and let them know that you are there for them instead of just teaching them and saying ‘well I am getting paid whether I teach you or not.’ The support system in this school is just majorly off the chart crazy and that’s what makes me want to keep being here and keep doing what I have to do more. Because at my other schools, the teachers made it seem like they didn’t care about what I am doing or about me as a person. They would act like they would, but they really wouldn’t and when I come here and the teachers, when I look at them and see what I bring, they actually look at me like they care about me and I feel loved. That’s what they offer me here.”

BJ: “[Instructors need to] give them the help that they need. Meaning like if they have problems at home or whatever the case may be, you can bring it here and they can get it settled so people won’t have to leave school ...Help them outside so they can come to school and they want to go to school.”

TC: “[To help me succeed] I need a stronger support team, a lot of one on one time, a lot of encouraging words--that’s what I like. I like when people tell me.”

AR: “I feel like we have a good bond -- like a neutral bond I guess. They are mostly positive.”

MS: “It ain’t really much to say. I love them all dearly. It’s like if anything happened to them, I would be there to help them out. I don’t like to see them upset. I care about them just as much as they care about me.”

JS: “We at a equal level because they understand me and it helps me get through the stuff when I need help, so they be there.”

SM: “Really hands on training can’t get no better than that. And can’t forget to mention they been patient and easy to talk to.”

MS2: “When I was a student, my relationships were close to the faculty. I looked at them as my friends and some as my mentors.”

The third theme -- building positive and supporting relationships with out-of-school youth -- is an important premise to note in this study. In addition, as previously mentioned, twelve out of twelve students cited building relationships as a reason for re-engagement as well as lack of support as the reason they leave school. Understanding both sides of the equation – first, that many students feel unsupported, and then that, when given support, they often thrive--provides valuable insight into the work of organizations working with newly reengaged students. Some of the responses included:

AR: “They told me another place would suit me better than the school where I was at. Because I needed a lot more support.”

BH: “My reason was because I had a baby and I wanted to go somewhere where there would be support and I wouldn’t play around in school.”

JS: “It was too hard for me. And they wasn’t paying me no mind.”

SM: “Lack of support.”

Three major themes were gathered from the qualitative data. As a result of analyzing response questions and focus group discussion, this researcher found that students and faculty recognize that media arts can be used to reengage out-of-school youth by providing students with 1) the opportunity to learn new and unique skill sets, 2) the opportunity for self-exploration, self-expression, and confidence-building, and 3) the opportunity to create authentic bonds with instructors and peers.

CHAPTER FIVE SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

This chapter provides a summary of the study as well as the limitations, implications, and conclusion of the findings. Given the individual and societal problems associated with dropping out of high school, research shows that there is a critical need to reengage the thousands of youth who drop out of high school every year in the United States. According to researchers, the dropout situation in America is not hopeless. Many believe that a simple solution to the current state of out-of-school youth is to develop high quality reengagement strategies. This study is not focused on the causes of the current high school dropout rate, nor did it solely speak to the ways that art can be used to reengage out-of-school youth, but instead the purpose of this research was to answer the question: How can media arts be used to reengage out-of-school youth?

To complete this study, the qualitative research method was used to collect data. Qualitative data was collected through on-camera interviews and focus groups. Qualitative research was used to get the stories behind the subjects experiences. The field study consisted of interacting with the faculty and students at YESPhilly to make generalizations about the wider population of disconnected youth and youth workers. This ethnography allowed the researcher to observe and document the culture and systems of YESPhilly -- especially in relation to media arts.

Three major themes were gathered from the qualitative data. As a result of analyzing response questions, the literature review, and focus group discussions, this researcher found that students and faculty recognize that media arts can be used to reengage out of school youth by providing students with 1) the opportunity to learn

new and unique skill sets, 2) the opportunity for self-exploration, self-expression, and confidence-building, and 3) the opportunity to create authentic bonds with instructors and peers.

Several quotations from both the interviews and focus groups were used to support the three overarching themes. One quotation that spoke to the theme that media arts can be used to teach new and unique skills was seen in the statement by student TT when he said, “I would say like I think media is a good way to recruit students because it teaches them something new that they can find a liking to and be able to take to new programs.”

On a similar note, a comment by instructor KD supports the theme of using media arts for self-exploration, self-expression, and confidence-building:

One of my purposes is to inspire young people or people in general to improve themselves and then the world around them. In ... my class which was called self-improvement, I expressed to them that I enjoy doing that even more so than video production because video production is just a tool to do that. Filmmaking is a talent that I connect to my purpose, but at the core of it, it is all about inspiring and encouraging people to improve other people and themselves. So even if you were to tear away the media arts, graphic design, video, fashion, and all that, students would still get that from [the media department] in some shape or form. So I think one of the things that makes the media arts program important to some students is that they walk away inspired. I often time use film, media, and graphics to support what I am teaching them more than another teacher would because it is my background,

it's one of my passions, what I went to school for, but at the end of the day I think one of the reasons students are drawn to the media arts program is because when they walk away, they leave feeling inspired.

Lastly, an example of a statement that can be used to support the theme of building positive relationships with instructors and peers is in MS's comment when he said,

[Instructors need to tell students to] keep their heads straight. Tell them that you care about them every day because the teachers already do that as it is. So just remind them every morning even they are having a bad day and they just feel like oh I can't do this today. Just let them know you can do this today and you want to know why? Cause I got your back and I am right there with you and whatever you are going through, you can talk to me about it and then we can help you get your work done. Stay over top of their head and let them know that you are there for them instead of just teaching them and saying well I am getting paid whether I teach you or not. The support system in this school, the support system in this school is just majorly off the chart crazy and that's what makes me want to keep being here and keep doing what I have to do more. Because at my other schools the teachers made it seem like they didn't care about what I am doing or about me as a person. They would act like they would but they really wouldn't and when I come here and the teachers, when I look at them, and see what I bring they actually look at me like they care about me and I feel loved. That's what they offer me here.

Limitations

Although the qualitative data in this study helps this researcher to make recommendations to the field, there were several limitations to the study. One major limitation was related to feedback from students who participated in the study. Because YESPhilly has rolling admission, every eight-nine weeks students graduated and/or were discharged while new students were being admitted. This made it difficult to do follow up questioning of participants and to get their feedback on the responses that this researcher gathered.

Another limitation was the inability to get alumni to participate in the study. Although this researcher reached out to alumni to be interviewed via social media, they were often too busy to participate in the study. Although two former students chose to participate, they represent a very small percentage of students that have successfully completed the program. In the future, I would recommend trying alternative ways to contact former students.

A third limitation was restricting the study to only out-of-school youth who were engaged in a media arts experience at YESPhilly. This researcher recommends that future research include insight from in-school students who participate in media arts activities in traditional academic environments. In addition, future researchers should consider interviewing students in alternative programs who return to school after being classified as an out-of-school youth to compare students' opinions of varying reengagement strategies as well as research with young people who are still disconnected from school.

The above limitations had an affect on the depth of the study and the ability to gather more answers to the research question of: How can media arts be used to reengage out-of-school youth?

Implications for Further Research

The implications of this research could potentially affect how out-of-school youth are recruited and retained in alternative programming. In addition these findings will be of interest to policy-makers, teaching artists, media literacy professionals, educators, administrators, and parents. The implications of this study are designed to stimulate conversation and action around out-of-school youth and high-quality reengagement strategies.

Teaching Artists

Teaching artists, especially media-teaching artists, are not an organized body of professionals and therefore are missing the opportunity to support alternative programs that reengage out-of-school youth. It is overdue that media-teaching artists begin working together to define their field and its best practices. Media-teaching artists, as a growing group of instructors, could be more intentional about working with alternative school programs to provide non-traditional supports to young people who want to reengage in society but desire unique opportunities for learning such as media and the arts. Teaching artists also need to be preparing students for college and careers in the media and communications field.

Funding

Congress needs to allocate funding to research, curriculum development, and teaching artists training for out-of-school youth. Congress also needs to raise the importance of reengaging out-of-school youth by analyzing and disseminating information about alternative school programs and best practices for working with disengaged young people. Funders also need to support the recruitment and retention of out-of-school youth in alternative school programs by working closely with alternative program administrators and instructors.

Media & Media Literacy Professionals

Media and media literacy professionals need to put alternative educators and out-of-school youth on the agenda for growth of the media field. Media professionals need to serve as mentors to out-of-school youth as well as provide job shadowing, job-training, and employment opportunities. Media-literacy professionals need to open professional development opportunities and professional membership associations to include alternative school administration and instructors.

Alternative School Educators & Administration

Like teaching artists, alternative-school educators and administrators need to raise their visibility by becoming an organized body. Alternative-school educators and administrators are missing the opportunity to raise their visibility because they are failing to define their field—a field separate from public-school educators. Alternative-school educators and administrators need to define the best practices for working in the field by creating their own conferences and professional membership organizations. Alternative educators and administrators need to be working with

local and national policymakers to ensure that the needs of out-of-school youth are being met while also protesting laws and stereotypes that devalue the young people who they support.

Out-of-school Youth & Parents

Out-of-school youth and their parents need to demand what is best for their futures by using their media-making skills to share stories about why young people leave traditional schools as well as success stories about completing their education in alternative-school environments. Out-of-school youth need to use their media training and go into college and/or careers in the field. Parents need to be involved in their children's alternative-school programs and hold their instructors and administrators accountable for success.

Conclusion

What conclusions can be drawn as a result of this study? One conclusion is that media arts can, in fact, help to recruit out-of-school youth, but retention will be determined by whether students can build positive relationships with their instructors, their peers, and their community at large. Another conclusion is that media arts is engaging to young people when they learn new and unique skills that help them with getting into college and/or careers. A final conclusion is that out-of-school youth benefit from using media arts for self-expression, self-discovery, and confidence-building.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS Information Sheet

- **Purpose of the Study:** Hello, I (Ms. Jeannine Cook) am conducting a research study on YESPhilly's media arts offerings to complete my thesis.
- **What will the study involve?** This study will involve a short questionnaire, observations, and focus groups.
- **Why have you been asked to take part?** You have been asked because you are either a current or former YESPhilly student or staff member.
- **Do you have to take part?** The answer is no! – participation is voluntary. You will sign a consent form. You have the option of withdrawing before the study commences (even if you have agreed to participate) or discontinuing after data collection has started.
- **Will your participation in the study be kept confidential?** Yes! Yes. I will ensure that no clues to your identity appear in the thesis. Any extracts from what you say that are quoted in the thesis will be entirely anonymous.
- **What will happen to the information which you give?** The data will be kept confidential for the duration of the study. On completion of the thesis, they will be retained for a further six months and then destroyed.
- **What will happen to the results?** The results will be presented in my thesis. They will be seen by my supervisor and advisor. The thesis may be read by future students on the course. The study may be published in a research journal.
- **What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?** I don't envisage any negative consequences for you in taking part.
- **What if there is a problem?** At the end of the interview, focus group, or survey I will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling. If you subsequently feel distressed, you should contact your school counselor.
- **Who has reviewed this study?** Approval must be given by the Department of Art and Design Education at the University of the Arts before studies like this can take place.
- **Any further queries?** If you need any further information, you can contact

me: Jeannine Cook.

- If you agree to take part in the study, please sign the consent form overleaf.

Consent Form

I.....agree to participate Jeannine Cook's research study.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing.

I am participating voluntarily.

I give permission for my interview to be tape-recorded

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up by disguising my identity.

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the thesis and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

(Please tick one box:)

I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview

Signed.....

Date.....

APPENDIX B

AGE	Race	Sex	GED OR SCHOOL
18	African American	Male	SCHOOL
22	African American	Male	SCHOOL
18	Black. I am African American	Female	SCHOOL
22	Black & Mexican	Male	SCHOOL
18	African American	Male	GED

19 African American	Male	SCHOOL
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18 Black/African American	Male	High school
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18 Black	Male	GED
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23 Black/African American	Female	GED
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25 Black & Filipino	Female	GED
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25 Brown American	Male	GED
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REASON FOR LEAVING

Um told me the place here would suit me better than the school where I was

I did a couple of bad things and wanted to turn my life around. Change.
Change of setting.

My reason was because I had a baby and I wanted to go somewhere where there would be new people and I wouldn't play around in school.

One of the reasons was uhm being late, they kicked me out. Over and over aga

I recently got kicked out of King for a riot incident. So I had came here to

REASONS FOR RETURNING

I never left.

Different environment. Different crowd. Whole atmosphere. ((Is that helping you)) YES.

I got a daughter and I needed to do better.

I am too old not to have my diploma.

GED

INTERESTING ACTIVITIES

The trip we took to the bowling alley because that was just an interesting day in itself because I got to see my teachers out of a school setting. It made me feel more comfortable.

Our work program, INCs, our summer jobs, basketball, mural arts, and other stuff-- cause work because back before the summer we learned about Positive Psychology so we went through various activities such as one activity whatever you plant it will grow which means if you plant bad stuff like if I wake up in the morning and plant like I am going to fight somebody then that it is what will be in your mind planted and that's what you gon do but if you wake up like I'm gonna pass my classes today, I'm gon stay out of trouble today, then that is what sticks in your mind all day. So that's a big difference from my last school.

I think that YESPhilly INC would be. I don't know why because it is different. You get to do different things. It gives everyone a chance to come back and get a second chance in school and finish what they started.

I would say the afterschool program. I find it interesting because they help you, they teach you different skills, while you get paid.

I could say the circle because we can all have a talk and we all explain how we feel in the circle. Like if we don't like things or come into a disagreement we can talk about it in the circle.

WOULD COULD HELP RECRUIT STUDENTS

If we did events outside like positive events in the community you know we can go to Rittenhouse square one of these days and do things that would get people involved and then they would learn that we are an alternative high school or GED program and then we could go from there.

Show them attractions that the school like and show them attractions and what the school is about, don't show them that the school is just about learning show them that we do have a basketball team, that we do got mural arts, we got music class-- audio production. Show them that we do go on field trips--positive field trips-- like things that have to do stuff for the school. Cause if you just show a student school a student gon think I'm going to school just to get my diploma and he gon think I'm gon get into the same trouble. But if I go to school and play ball. Play ball might have somebody come right to school good grades and all that and play on the basketball team. Learn to be other things--he like music, alright I'm going to go to school for music things like that.

Im not too sure. We already got posters and flyers everywhere. That is how I found out about the school. So I am not too sure. When I was at Edison this lady who I think used to work here she was like I think you should try this school she was like it is the best my daughter went here and she graduated so I was like alright but when I went back to Edison I told her go here she was like oh that is the school I was telling you about. I was like ok.

Students actually recruiting students. Send the students out like downtown or something where they are bums or people who dropped out of school. Like young bums. There are young bums down there.

Better grades? My father told me about it. Because somebody used to work here at YESPhilly before he got fired and he got me into this program.

PREVENT STUDENTS FROM DROPPING OUT

ACTIVITIES TO STAY

A dean of students cause we don't have one. So The mural arts program.

That's a good question. I just got to stay active like what I said on the second questions, I can't be around negativity so that's what's going to make me negative I got to be around be around positive and I got to be doing something, I got to be active that is why I come here calm.

Im not too sure. Some kids don't feel like not coming to school--especially with their age. If you don't live with your parents and they are not forcing it then you're not going to want to go to school. My daughter is my motivation to keep me going to school. A lot of the students are old or they feel old or they

If there was a stronger support team. A lot of one on one time. Alot of encouraging words. That's what I like. I like when people tell me.

Give them the help that they need. Meaning like if they have problems at home or whatever the case may be you can bring it here and they can get it settled so people won't have to leave school cause they think...help them outside so they can come to school and they want to got school.

None. My daughter. Im not sure.

I like hands on activities. A lot of science stuff. Like when we go out and do experiments outside. Hands on stuff. I like that. I think that will keep me in school.

I would have to say sports like basketball, football, tennis it don't matter as long as you keep us active.

DEFINITION

Like photography and like video. I guess that is another way to express yourself. A form of expression.

That's a big question. I think of art. I think of different people doing different things to change different things. Media arts I think of art like painting, drawing, picking up trash off the floor like I don't know.

When I hear media arts I think of computer and cameras but art with that stuff. Like a movie, a play, something like that.

Exquisite. Cause if you put both of them together you make a good scene or if you act it out or if you write it on pen and paper its still going to come out good.

WHAT DO WE OFFER

We do audio production, video production, we have a calendar I don't know if that counts but I guess.

We did like positive psychology and other activities like what did you do today or how do you feel today and we will draw a circle with a symbol inside and say peace or a draw a sad face and things stuff like that.

No I cannot. I do not know all of them. I don't even know any other than YESPhilly INC and I think with Mr. Konrad. I don't even know where that class is after school.

We did a play. We did, what else did we do, uhm we did a tv show called the YESPhilly Amazing Race. I got to host it and now we are doing a store.

I really can't because I don't have the class. I can say that Mr. Kaloni used to teach me how to make commercials and stuff. He showed me how to cut and put audio together to make a nice little scene so you can understand it without it going through a full movie but pictures.

WHAT MEDIA ARTS INTERESTS YOU?

Drawing. I don't know how to draw but I would rather draw than talk to people cause I can draw out my feelings.

I think painting because that is how I express myself. I like to draw so I think painting would be good.

Cameras. I like being on it. In front of it. Either or.

Yea [media] can be interesting cause it can help me out in the long term run. Say if somebody needed something and I was the only one who knew how to do it caused I learned it and it would come in handy to other people.

WHAT HAVE YOU TAKEN

I took the arts and humanities class that Ms. Jeannine was in charge

Not really. Audio yea. That's one of them cause Mr. Margel has an audio class and he will tell us to play a song that has us feeling a certain way and I played poppa was a rolling stone

I don't know cause I had that early last year.

RELATIONSHIP WITH INSTRUCTOR

I feel like we have a good bond. Like a neutral bond I guess. They are mostly positive.

Cool. Respectable. He understands where we come from as young adults.

I don't really know any of them but I know Ms. T because I had fashion class. I know her a lot. Other than Ms. T I don't really know any of them because this is my first time being with them. She was a fashion design teacher and then she did jewelry but somehow we did not have that class this semester. It was useful because I liked that class. It wasn't really useful but I liked that class.

I would say up and down cause I don't have their class anymore so they treat me like they don't know me. Then other things we will bust it up and kick it back.

HOW HAS MEDIA ARTS EFFECTED YOUR YESPHILLY EXPERIENCE

It effected me just a little bit because I learned something that I did not know.

HOW CAN THE PROGRAM BE IMPROVED

Newer technology. There is not anything wrong with it but new wouldn't hurt.

It's no improvements. I would say get better, but as far as the media arts program as you can see no body drops out .

I think it's doing fine. I mean we work, we got workout Wednesdays, we go on trips. I like it the way it is. I like finding our ideas of what we are going to do to help get money and stuff like that.

Better computers, well not even better computers but better software so we can make bigger and better things.

HAVE YOU USED YOUR MEDIA SKILLS OUTSIDE OF

I haven't

Yes alright for example there is this person on my block and he looks like he is homeless but every morning I go to school I always say the mind is like a fertile garden, whatever you plant will grow so he will plant that in my head oh you not gonna be this you, you not going to be that so I block him out with my thoughts, saying Im gonna be this and Im going to be that.

I don't think so. Yes I have. We um the shirts that we are making I took a picture and put it on instagram a lot of people like them and some people asked to buy them but we are not close to that yet.

I used it once when I had to make a slideshow for my mom and her cheerleading squad the North Philly Hurricanes.

ADDITIONAL INFO

It's a great program overall. That's it.

So media arts is cool if you want to be positive and you want to change your life around and do what you need to do to get yourself out there or do what you need to do to be positive be in media arts cause that's where you will express yourself.

I like the murals they did on the wall. Mr. Mike was saying that it is just not one person but they put everybody together. That was nice.

It's an excellent class to take.
It's a good class to take if you really want to learn about computer and media arts.

