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barrios unidos:
program evaluation of the multimedia program for youth

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Introduction

Founded in 1978, the Santa Cruz Chapter of Barrios Unidos (SCBU) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the goal of preventing and curtailing neighborhood violence. SCBU is the regional and national headquarters for the National Coalition of Barrios Unidos, which represents 27 chapters across the country. Their programs include community day-care centers, support groups for young parents, support groups for families, and support services for incarcerated youth and adults.

The Barrios Unidos Multimedia Program for Youth (MPY) is an eight to ten week multimedia job training and academic skill enhancement program designed for implementation at alternative education high schools. The MPY teaches technical, multimedia skills while providing youth with the opportunity to express themselves creatively in a safe environment. The introduction of technical skills happens sequentially. For example, students learn digital photography skills before learning how to import and edit photographs. However, the pace of the acquisition these skills is largely student-led. The students are viewed as active participants in their own education, progressing on to more advanced skills when they feel they have a solid grasp of the foundations of those skills. Similarly, the subject matter of the projects is also entirely up to the students. Their projects are viewed as an outlet for the students to express themselves. Therefore, very limited constraints are placed on the content. This leaves students free to express themselves creatively without fear of criticism.

Ceres Policy Research completed a program evaluation of the MPY. This research summary reports outcomes for youth participants from two alternative education high schools in Santa Cruz. Our study focused on whether the MPY led to improved technical skills, creative expression, emotional development, and peer relationships.

Research Design

To gain an understanding of the effects of participation in the MPY, Ceres Policy Research conducted a series of short, digitally recorded interviews that were later analyzed for reoccurring themes. Each open ended, semi-structured interview lasted between twelve and thirty minutes, with an average duration of approximately twenty minutes. We interviewed twelve youths at two different alternative education sites in Santa Cruz County: VISTA Community School, and the Cesar E. Chavez School for Social Change.

VISTA Community School was founded as an alternative education high school with the aim of empowering students and teaching them the skills needed to be able to run their own business enterprise. VISTA stands for Vocational Immersion for Successful

Transition to Adulthood. The school fosters academic success while providing youth with skills necessary to lead productive, independent lives.

In collaboration with the County Office of Education, Barrios Unidos is the host sight for the Cesar E. Chavez School for Social Change. The Cesar E. Chavez School is an alternative education high school whose aim is to empower and develop leadership skills in youth, while fostering protective factors and reducing "at-risk" factors at work in their daily lives.

Demographic details for respondents from both schools are described below:

- Eight of the respondents are students at the Cesar E. Chavez School for Social Change. Four are students at VISTA Community School.
- Nine of the respondents (75%) are Latino, two are White (17%), and one is African American (less than 1%).
- Two of the respondents (17%) were girls and ten were boys (83%).
- Four of the twelve respondents (33%) were born in Mexico and immigrated to the United States with their family.
- The respondents ages range from sixteen to twenty years, with a mean age of seventeen.
- Three of the participants (25%) had been expelled from their previous school for fighting, two (17%) were sent to alternative high school as a result of truancy, four (33%) reported attending alternative high school as a personal choice, and one (less than 1%) declined to state why he was going to alternative high school.

Findings

Technical skill development

All twelve of the students participating in MPY learned new software skills. A number of students also learned digital photography, video, and recording skills. The one student who was already very skilled also reported learning new software skills on Macintosh computers that he never had the opportunity to try:

> **I got to learn how to use i...what's it called...ivideo or iphoto or something like that. There are some programs that are not on a PC or Windows, so I got to learn the new ones. *–youth interview***

Table 1 (see page 3) reports the specific software packages and digital technology skills introduced to the students and the number of students reporting an increase of ability using that software package or skill.[1]

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[1] *Due to the design of the program and resources available, not all participants in the program had the opportunity to be introduced to all the programs listed.*

Table 1: New Skills Learned by MPY Participants

software package or skill	number of students reporting new knowledge of software or improvement in skills
iTunes	6
iPhoto	10
iMovie	12
music production software (Reason, Garage band)	3
digital photography and importing images	8
digital camcorder and importing video	5
Photoshop	2

Half of the youth reported an increased proficiency with computers during the course of the multimedia program. These students indicated a difference between their computer skill level computers before the program began, and their skill level after having gone through the multimedia class. Some examples of these findings are quoted below:

> **Now that I had the multimedia class, I think I'm a lot better than I was before.** *-youth interview*

It was hard for me to just turn the computer on [before starting the program]. *-youth interview*

All twelve respondents felt that the skills they learned in the multimedia program may help them in their future.

I was just excited 'cuz it was cool to learn something that can help me later on in life. If I end up getting a job somewhere, doing stuff like this...at least I'd have a little bit more knowledge about it... *-youth interview*

Of those twelve, seven expressed a desire to use computers again in the future.

Nowadays everything is about computers ya know? And all that technology, and I think they will probably help me. *-youth interview*

Even one student who said that he doesn't really "dig" computers reported that he enjoyed learning how to make videos. When asked if he thought he would pursue any of the skills he learned he admitted wanting to pursue the photographic skills he acquired in the program

Actually I was thinking of becoming like a photographer for like a surfing or something. *-youth interview*

Creative expression

Ten of the twelve participants (with one failure to respond) saw the program as a positive outlet for creative expression.

Its a new experience, you know? You get to see your thoughts on a movie, and your feelings. *-youth interview*

One student reported multiple creative outlets or hobbies outside of the MPY, yet still felt transformed by the program.

...that was really how I felt when I did the slide show, was I'm proud of the school, I'm proud of Barrios Unidos. Everything's awesome, so it expressed more about me and it was really good cuz... I don't know... like being in the Multimedia class, I wasn't as angry as I used to be, or so emotional. Like being in the class I had a chance to be on the computer and get everything out, but do what I like, you know? So it was awesome. *-youth interview*

Emotional development outcomes

Many of the respondents reported that participation in the MPY led to some form of positive emotional outcome. Of the twelve youths interviewed, four expressed greater confidence in their abilities, four expressed feeling of pride do to the work they completed in the course, and five expressed excitement about learning how to use computers. Though some youth expressed more than one of these developments, ten of the twelve youths we interviews expressed at least one emotional outcome. Examples of some of these un-prompted responses are listed below:

> **I'm proud of it because I never thought I'd be able to do something like that... it was really awesome. *-youth interview***

> **I couldn't believe I did it, ya know? It was crazy. *-youth interview***

> **The feeling that your going do something new and learn, learn different stuff that you didn't know. Knowing that excites you. You can feel it you know? *-youth interview***

> **I never thought I'd be doing something like that. Never thought I'd do a slide show or anything, but now that I got it. And I'm excited to tell people about it and, help them out try to do something. *-youth interview***

Fostering positive peer relationships

One particular theme that emerged in the interviews was that of positive relationships being constructed through the course of the class. Students expressed a number of times that they were helped by other students on their projects.

> **Some of them know a little bit more, and some of them don't know anything at all, but they all, like, help each other, and they really helped me a lot. *-youth interview***

> **It was just pretty cool cuz everyone was, like, so into each other and was like, "Oh let me help you with this!", and "Oh! That looks cool!", so everybody was working together but doing their own thing, and in [regular] class its not really like that. It's everybody is doing their own thing so they're going to do their own thing. Don't bother anybody you know? And, I dunno, it was just different in there, but it wasn't like... it wasn't like class. It was it was just different. It was like we were just someplace hanging out and, ya know, just kinda working on our computers, so we were all just helping each other out. *-youth interview***

Another student spoke about a new friendship he had formed with a student in the class.

> **She was always asking me, "hey how do you do this? How do you do that?" I knew her for like.. two years, and I didn't really talk to her, and she didn't talk to me, but after that I started talking to her more. Got me a friend. *-youth interview***

They also were a number of instances where students said they were able to help others in their class, demonstrating a clear mastery of the skills they had learned.

> **With the new multi media class, I came in there a few times just to burn a CD really quick, and they were asking questions and stuff so I told them "Oh yeah you do this you do that" and I was like "Hey I got it!" (laughs). *-youth interview***

One Latino student even taught his dad how to use the computer.

> **I taught my dad how to download music and all that, and how to play it on the iTunes thing. *-youth interview***

Conclusion

Ceres Policy research finds a number of positive outcomes for youth participating in the Barrios Unidos Multimedia Program for Youth.

The program meets its explicit aims of teaching technical skills and providing a creative outlet for youth to express themselves.

The program goes beyond these goals by fostering positive feelings of accomplishment and excitement about learning, the perception of expanded possibilities for future learning and development, and the development of positive peer relationships.

As such, the Barrios Unidos Multimedia Program for Youth provides a promising model for teaching multimedia skills to youth.