

NOT JUST A TEACHER, ALSO A CONNECTOR: INCREASING EDUCATOR BROKERING ORIENTATION AND CAPACITY

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AUDIENCE

Informal Educators Mentors and Teaching Artists

Internship Program Managers or College/Career

Coordinators, Teachers

WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

Informal educators who focus on artistic, media-based, or tech-oriented pedagogies might usually think of their roles as being about knowledge-building — they teach young people skills, create contexts for collaboration and creation, and share insights into different domains or professions. They might also think about themselves as generally supportive adults who provide emotional support, “life advice,” and help as youth navigate the complex years of early adolescence. But they have another important role, one especially critical if they want to more fully address issues related to equitable access to different futures — informal educators are “learning brokers” who actively connect youth to new opportunities, people, and institutions that can help them further their life-long learning pathways and identities.

In considering “learning broker” as one of the key roles of informal educators, questions come up about how we can support their ability to effectively play this role. This brief addresses some questions about how we might support informal educators to develop a “brokering orientation”, an important factor that needs to be in place for successful brokering to happen.

CHALLENGES

- Educators in creative media informal organizations are often professional working artists, seeking professional development in education and pedagogical approaches.
- Depending on the kind of time informal educators spend with youth, it can be much easier to stay in familiar “knowledge-building” roles, since effective brokering can require a deeper relationship and knowledge of youth interests.

- Even when an educator has a brokering orientation, the staffing structures they work within can sometimes get in the way. This is especially true if they're part-time specialists and don't fully participate in the larger professional learning opportunities within an educational organization and its associated networks.
- Informal educators are sometimes so focused on the programs they run that they might not even know about additional opportunities for youth within their organization, let alone beyond it

ATTENDING TO EQUITY

- **Explicitly introduce brokering as a key role and practice during educator on-boarding** after they're hired and **within internal professional development activities**.
- If your organizational model involves teaching artists or technology professionals that are part-time, **invest in having part-time educators participate in professional learning activities, partnerships and broader networks**, and, ideally, be reliably involved in facilitating programs over time, rather than having a "one-off" relationship with your organization.
- **Have informal educators consider what their distinctive expertise and associated networks are**. Often we take for granted not just what we know but who we know. Having educators reflect on this explicitly within the context of considering their roles as brokers helps us to keep in mind what we might bring to the table that's distinctive in terms of the social, cultural, and professional worlds we can connect young people to.
- **Collectively develop strategies among informal educators related to how they can signal and share their expertise and associated networks** in the context of their interactions with youth. For example, at Beam Center, a "maker" oriented education organization that works in New York City schools, staff worked to prototype a common format for introductions when they started working with a new group of youth, where they highlighted different aspects of their background that would support youth to know what kinds of supports and connections they could request from educators.
- **Highlight and share-out youth pathway successes that educators supported by being learning brokers**. Informal learning organizations are full of stories about how youth go on to their next steps after having been involved an organization. Highlight these stories among staff and especially focus on the brokering "moves" that your educators used to support these youth to find their next step instead of only the youth successes alone.
- **Bring informal educators together to reflect on and share the local institutions and organizations they're familiar with**. This both serves to orient front-line educators to be thinking about the practice of brokering, but also builds collective capacity and shared organizational knowledge around opportunities that might be a good fit for your organization's youth. Consider making this explicit as a routine with an associated list or database that gets maintained and updated.



APPROACHES TO CONSIDER

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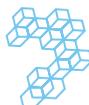
REFLECTION QUESTIONS

For organizational leaders:

- How do educators in my organization see their role? What can I do to orient them to the idea that they're not just there to share knowledge and be emotionally supportive, but also to connect youth to other learning opportunities within and beyond our organization?
- How can our internal professional development and onboarding be improved to support the capacity of our educators to be learning brokers?
- What networks are my front-line staff connected to that they should keep in mind to help them make connections for youth?
- What kind of infrastructure does my organization have in place to get knowledge about future opportunities into frontline educators' hands in a way that makes it easy to share with our youth?

For front-line educators:

- What kinds of networks am I connected to that my youth might not have access to?
- Do youth find me approachable to ask about opportunities? What am I doing to explicitly invite that sort of help-seeking from the young people I work with?
- What do the youth I work with know about my skills, interests, and knowledge? What can I do to give them a better idea of the types of things they can come to me about?



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