

# CAPSTONE AS STEPPING STONE: LEVERAGING END-OF-PROGRAM EVENTS FOR PATHWAY-BUILDING

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## AUDIENCE

Informal / OST Educators  
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## WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

End-of-project “capstone” events are a common feature of out-of-school time (OST) and classroom-based programs, especially in creative media and technology programs. They afford young people a structured way to present their individual or group creations in a public or semi-public audience and are generally recognized as being settings for collective celebration and feelings of personal accomplishment. These settings may also provide an important context for brokering future learning opportunities to youth, acting as an important node within broader learning ecosystems (Penuel, Clark, & Bevan, 2017). They offer the potential for youth to gain new knowledge and new understandings through interactions with others, to feel a deeper connection to a community, and to gain valued forms of social capital.

This brief offers guidance on ways that educators may leverage end-of-project capstone events as not only ones of celebration and accomplishment, but also as important sites for brokering — and thus will further support youth pathways of learning and identity-building.

## ATTENDING TO EQUITY

Capstone events are important and underutilized contexts for supporting youth pathways. In this brief we offered some features that can help capstone events serve as sites for brokering. However, it's important to keep in mind that for youth to take advantage of these events, they may need practice with social capital building activities that often fall under the umbrella of networking — approaching experts, making conversation, “code-switching,” and asking for help. Preparing students for capstone events is an important ingredient in helping such events promote youth pathways of learning and identity-building.

## APPROACHES TO CONSIDER

Capstone events represent an opportunity for brokering — youth can learn about and be connected to future learning opportunities and develop relationships with other adults and peers who can support their ongoing learning and development. Here are some ways to help support those outcomes.

### Help youth learn about and be connected to future learning opportunities.

- Source future learning opportunities from event attendees and others to be shared during the event. Since events usually attract youth with similar interests, this is a good opportunity to reach out to registrants and offer to share information about other events, in- and out-of-school programs, and scholarship information.
- Help “close the loop” by encouraging interested students to provide contact information or sign up for other opportunities on the spot. At Emoti-Con! organizers provided a table where registration flyers advertising various youth opportunities would be displayed at cross-organizational events. Flyers included spaces for youth to add their name, phone number, and email addresses, and a “table broker” was present who could sign youth up and follow-up with youth after the event. Large text-based tags were included to make it easier for both youth and the table broker to spot the right flyer.



### Help youth develop relationships with other adults and peers who can support their ongoing learning and development.

- Invite individuals from communities that youth value or aspire to join and create opportunities for feedback and socializing. This will increase the likelihood that youth at the event will meet and perhaps develop relationships with individuals who have the technological expertise and knowledge of opportunities and other individuals that can help them continue to explore and deepen their interests within a particular domain.



- Create opportunities for youth to receive project feedback and advice. It is also important to provide a structured way for youth and experts to interact. This will help create opportunities for youth to learn and gain valuable information as well as build contacts and develop professional relationships. For example, at Emoti-Con!, working professionals in various digital media and creative arts fields who shared interests with the young people there were invited to participate in a Networking Hour as well as serve as guest judges
- Invite youth to contribute to the guest list. By offering youth the opportunity to introduce individuals from their existing network to an event, you allow them to share more about their interests and capabilities. Although from a young person's perspective, learning and identity building happens across multiple settings (home, school, afterschool programs), the individuals at those settings (parents, family members and siblings, teachers and school staff, OST educators, etc.) often witness only the learning and identity building at a single setting. By encouraging this sort of mixing of settings, other individuals in youth's social networks are better able to support them and offer their support, including brokering support.
- Help youth take full advantage of capstone events by offering networking support and practice opportunities to youth prior to the event. To help youth feel more comfortable in such situations, practitioners may consider offering support prior to the capstone event. For example, before attending Emoti-Con!, youth who were part of a program called CITYExpeditions designed by The Knowledge House and CITYPathways, engaged in a simple 15-minute role-playing activity in which students and peer mentors pretended that they were part of a science fair-style event. Students acted as youth presenters while OST educators and peer mentors assumed roles as guest judges. Afterward, youth and peer mentors shared their learnings and observations. For example, one educator pointed out an interaction in which a student mentioned wanting to keep in touch but then never initiated an exchange of contact information.



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Does this event offer ways for young people to showcase their accomplishments and expertise?
- Does this event allow for interactions with individuals from the communities that youth value or aspire to join?
- Who do young people wish to invite to the event?

## REFERENCES

Penuel, W. R., Clark, T., & Bevan, B. (2016). Designing and building infrastructures to support equitable STEM learning across settings. *Afterschool Matters*, 24, 12-20.



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