**Connected Learning Handout 4: Theory into Practice**

Following are strategies and approaches described in Martin’s article, *Connected Learning, Librarians and Connecting Youth Interest*⁴ to support library staff in co-creating learning with youth.

**A. Strategies to develop peer-supported learning:**

1) Have youth help design or run programs in which they have expertise, whether their interests are in book or video game clubs, fiber crafting, or computer programming.

2) Allow programs to be flexible enough that peers are able to ask one another for feedback and advice. Give the youth scaffolds and, potentially, parameters to work within, and then let them make projects on their own.

3) Librarians can position themselves as co-learners, instead of as pure experts, and be willing to try programming that they have not already mastered. For example, adults can show they are ready to dive into any new topic a teen is interested in, even if they do not know much about it.

**B. Strategies to support interest-powered programming:**

1) Ask individual teens directly about their interests. Build trusting relationships without judgment of their interests. Librarians can do this with casual conversation starters, such as commenting on book selections youth have made, probing about musical interests if they often wear headphones, and other such approaches based on contextual clues.

2) Ask members of the teen advisory board or teen volunteers about their interests is a way to potentially discover a broad set of interests, if only among the most motivated and engaged youth.

3) Run a survey, online or on paper, to ask youth about their interests. Whether choosing a paper or digital survey, keep it simple, with just one or two open-ended questions, such as “What are you interested in? What do you do for fun?” and “Would you like to see

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programming around this interest?” Also make sure youth are able to answer privately; teens are often reluctant to reveal their most passionate pursuits.

C. Strategies to support academically oriented learning:
1) Value youth’s expertise and recognize their skills and abilities. For youth, personal interests offer the opportunity to be recognized as an expert, which is often unavailable in other settings. It is important that youth be recognized for their abilities outside of their interests.

2) Make the connection between the skills youth develop/use when pursuing their interests and how those skills are valuable or important in academic or career pursuits. For example, bring in local professionals who can explain the path between interests and careers. The librarian can also accomplish this by filling the role of the professional, explaining how a student can take an interest in something such as video games, fashion, or design and turn that interest into a career.

D. Strategies to create production-centered learning:
1) Offer hands-on experiences through a challenging activity that requires learning new things. Offer a challenge that is open-ended, in which those participating have the option to choose their own product and create what they feel passionately about while seeking support when needed from those around them.

2) Check out Scratch (http://scratch.mit.edu/), which is an online programming language. It has a strong online community with active forums, more than 8 million existing projects that can be remixed as a way to learn programming, and accessible example projects. For example, it can be used for creating games, animations, and animated narratives, as well as for creating interactive art and music. The activities and workshops that are created around a program such as this do not have to have coding as their main focus. Instead, youth can explore creating music with coding, graphic novels through coding, or images to go with a story.

E. Strategies to harness a shared purpose in learning:
1) Recognize that young people are actively participating in communities focused around their interests. The communities often involve a high level of commitment, production and passion.

2) Find out what youth are interested in, where they spend time on social media or in other online communities by asking them. Take care to listen and not place judgment, but rather
acknowledge the connections the young people share with others across the globe who share similar interests.

F. Strategies to support openly networked learning: Online platforms and digital tools can make learning resources abundant, accessible, and visible across all learner settings.

1) Create programs that focus on things about which youth are passionate—their interests, cultures, identity, and social relationships.

2) Use online platforms and digital tools to connect young people to others who share the same interests, learn more about their interests and develop skills that may connect to academic or career pursuits.