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AN EVALUATION OF THE YOUTH LEADERSHIP ACADEMY PROGRAM IN MONTCLAIR HIGH SCHOOL

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings from the evaluation of the implementation of the Youth Leadership Academy in Montclair High School. The Youth Leadership Academy (YLA) is an innovative web-based program that integrates character education, technology, and core academic skills into a seamless learning experience for students. The program is an integral component of the school's special education curriculum, and is used primarily to inform the instruction of students who are in self-contained classrooms. The evaluation is formative in nature and focuses on determining the status of the program's implementation, and its perceived effectiveness on teaching and learning. Although outcome measures on student performance are included in the report, these measures function primarily as benchmarking information against which subsequent progress will be gauged. The evaluation employed a multi-prong design that incorporated structured group interviews, focus group discussion, classroom observations, student surveys and measures of students' performance. The evaluation sample was inclusive of all the major constituencies that are impacted by the program.

Our overall findings are that the program is contributing to student growth and to faculty development as well. The program has created significant paradigmatic shifts to the teaching of character education, technology, and to the core academic subjects, such as English and Language Arts. The way in which the program allows for the design of knowledge work, the creation of an environment that supports learning, and the employment of pedagogic strategies to facilitate knowledge acquisition is commendable. This has resulted in increased levels of student

motivation. Students' interest in technology has spawned improvements in their academic self-concepts and has enhanced their general optimism about the future.

The report proffers some key recommendations based on the findings that, if implemented, will serve to strengthen the program as it moves into a second year of full implementation. These recommendations address such issues as planning time, additional professional development support for teachers, and a longitudinal follow-up study of students.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Introduction

In spite of the advances that we have seen in the field of special education, educators are still confronted with the problem of how to provide special education students with academic enriching experiences. This is particularly worrisome for those special education students who have the greatest academic and emotional needs. The evidence has shown that without quality educational opportunities and experiences these students are left unprepared to assume a meaningful and productive role in society. Cognizant of the need to redress some of the shortcomings in its own special education program offerings, the Montclair Public Schools decided in 2001 to embark on an innovative instructional path with its most needy high school special education students. Under the leadership of the Principal, Vice-Principal and Department Chair for Special Education, the district decided to become a pilot site for the Youth Leadership Academy (YLA).

The Youth Leadership Academy (YLA) is an innovative web-based program that integrates character education, technology, and core academic skills into a seamless learning experience for students. The integrative nature of the program and the pedagogical options that it offers teachers provided promising alternatives to the traditional curriculum and modes of pedagogy that existed in the school prior to the YLA adoption. The YLA program is the fruition of several years of development efforts by the National Urban Technology Center. Although the program has been successfully used with at-risk youngsters in many different sites, Montclair's adoption of YLA represents the first attempt to import the program into a public school setting.[1]

A mid-year evaluation conducted during the pilot year found that faculty, administrators, and students were overwhelmingly positive in their opinions about

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[1] YLA was first implemented in 1995, at the Concord Family Services, a foster care agency, in Brooklyn New York.

the program (Refer to Appendix B). The coherence and structure that it brought to the teaching and learning process, coupled with its interactive nature, were cited as some of the key reasons for its perceived success. This year's evaluation builds on and extends the data from the mid- year report.   The current academic year represents the first full year of implementation.   As such, there is an interest in understanding more fully how the program is being implemented, its impact on both teacher attitudes and pedagogy, and its effect on students' non-cognitive and academic performance.   We should state parenthetically that the timing of the evaluation constrains our ability to talk definitively about student effects. Because of reporting requirements, our evaluation is coming at the end of the first marking period, which is insufficient time to measure student impact. The student data is therefore presented as benchmarking information against which we will measure subsequent academic progress.

This evaluation report presents our major findings.   The report is schematically organized into the following sections: (1) Introduction, (2) History of YLA and Montclair's adoption of YLA, (3) Current implementation of the program, (4) Administrators' perceptions of the program, (5) Results from classroom observations and teacher focus group discussion, (6) Impact on students, and (7) Conclusion and recommendations.

Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation design employed in the study was multi-prong and involved the use of a mixed-method approach, as can be seen from the information presented in Table 1.   We decided to start the data collection process by first

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interviewing the program administrative staff. This included the Department Chair, the Curriculum Specialist who was responsible for leading the effort to align YLA with the special education curriculum, and the staff person responsible for providing technical assistance to YLA teachers.[2] We elected to use a structured group interview process rather than one-on-one interviews. To facilitate the interview, an interview guide was developed based on information gleaned from the mid-year report, program materials published by Urban Technology, and findings from other research studies on similar topics (Refer to Appendix A for a copy of the instrument). The interview lasted for an hour and focused on the following general themes: (i) An understanding of the special education curriculum prior to the adoption of YLA; (ii) an understanding of teaching and learning prior to YLA; (iii) implementation of YLA; (iv) observed changes in faculty and student behaviors since the adoption of YLA; and (v) perceived changes, if any in home - school relations since YLA's implementation.

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[2] The interview was held in December 2002.

Table 1: Evaluation Overview

Sample	Data Collection Strategy	Primary Focus
Program Administrators • Department Chairperson • Curriculum Specialist • Technical Assistant Faculty	Structured group Interview	• Special Education Curriculum before adoption of YLA • Perceived impact of YLA on teacher practices • Mode of pedagogy prior to YLA adoption • Implementation of program • Home –school connection
Classrooms employing YLA	Observations	Instruction and learning in YLA integrated classroom settings
YLA special education teachers	Focus group	• Scope of the academic program • student engagement • implementation challenges
Special education students in self – contained classroom participating in the program	Survey Academic and attendance data collected from student information system	• Academic self concept • General self concept • Feelings about the program • Academic performance • Other behavioral performance, e.g. attendance

Classroom Observations

In order to understand teaching and learning in the YLA classrooms, each YLA classroom was observed. To maximize reliability, two researchers were assigned to each classroom. Currently, the program is being implemented in two special-education self-contained classes and in the alternative school program. Two of these classrooms were observed for two periods, and one for one period.[3]

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[3] The classroom which was observed for only one period was the alternative program.

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Classroom observations were guided by Danielson's framework for professional practice (1996). Given the uniqueness of the program, not all the elements of Danielson's framework were relevant. We therefore extrapolated only those broad domains that could be validly applied to the program. These domains were: (1) Designing Knowledge Work, (2) Organizing the environment for knowledge, and (3) Facilitating knowledge work. It should be pointed out that our primary focus was to understand how the newly integrated curriculum facilitated the accomplishment of each of these domains, and not to evaluate teacher performance or behavior (See Appendix A for a sample of the instrument). For example, under Domain 2 (Organizing the environment for knowledge), an important element is the extent to which the physical space facilitates knowledge work.

Danielson's framework allowed us to arrive at subtle gradations of performance by providing concrete expectations. These expectations are based on research- proven effective classroom practices. For example, under Domain 1, the element instructional materials and resources, if materials are being optimally utilized this should be evidenced in a setting in which all materials and resources support the instructional goals, with most students engaged in meaningful learning. In contrast, a setting would be unsatisfactory if materials and resources do not support the instructional goals or engage students in meaningful learning.

Teacher Focus Group

An important focus of the evaluation was to determine participating special education faculty's perceptions of the program. To facilitate this goal, a focus group

was held with faculty who are currently utilizing the YLA curriculum. All five teachers took part in an hour-long taped discussion of the program. The discussion focused on a number of issues considered germane to understanding teacher practices and students' academic behaviors as well. The issues were framed to provide contrasting insights into the quality, nature and scope of the academic program, students' level of engagement in schooling, students' academic skills and teacher practices and behaviors prior to YLA's adoption with those that currently exist.

Student Survey

One of the unique programmatic and curricular focuses of YLA is its use of a multimedia rich environment to teach important life skills, as well as academic and technology skills to pupils. The program has been found to have a positive impact on students' self- concepts as well as academic skills. In keeping with the aims of the program, the student survey sought to measure the program's impact on (i) students' academic self concepts, (ii) students' general self concepts; (iii) students' opinions about the effects of YLA on their academic competencies; (iv) students' overall feelings about school; and (v) students' evaluations of their computer skills.

A five-point likert-type agreement scale was used to scale students' responses. The survey instrument also sought to tap into students' responses to specific learning components of the YLA program. Students were asked to indicate their level of enjoyment with the animated clips, participating in *Break it Down*, writing in their ejournal through *Write to the Point,* playing *We Got Game,* taking the quizzes in *Final Answer,* using the *Hot link Library,* working on *the Internet,* using *Microsoft Word* and doing *Power Point Presentations.* In addition to these areas,

we were also interested in determining the level of access that students have to computers at home. The student survey was administered during a class period.

Student Academic Data

Academic data on student performance was taken from the school's student information system. The data collected were first marking period grades in English and Technology; the two courses that are currently utilizing the YLA program as part of an integrated curriculum. In addition, data on the number of days absent for the first marking period was also collected.

Data Analysis

Given the different types of data collected in the study, a combination of qualitative and quantitative analytical techniques were used in the analyses. First, in presenting the results from the structured group interviews and the information gleaned from the focus group, an attempt is made to capture the emergent themes. These themes represent the overarching patterns that we detected in the data. Second, the data from the classroom observations are first discussed through the use of unfiltered narratives, and then interpretatively summarized using the domains and elements of Danielson's framework. This summary gives an overall sense of how YLA classrooms are engaging in practices that align with research-proven effective strategies. Finally, the student data, which are more quantitative in nature, are analyzed through the use of various statistical techniques. These techniques are more fully discussed in the sections in which these findings are presented.

HISTORY OF YLA AND MONTCLAIR HIGH SCHOOL'S ADOPTION

The following provides a brief overview of the history of the development of YLA. This information is excerpted from the Mid-Year Evaluation Report, which was conducted in 2001 and forms a backdrop to the present evaluation findings. YLA was launched as a pilot program in 1995 at Concord Family Services, a foster care agency, in Brooklyn, New York. The pilot served to test the efficacy and potential for a life skills and computer-training model for youths. Evidence gathered from this pilot was pivotal to Urban Tech's decision to expand its life skills program and to center the program components around mentoring and the participation of the entire community.

In order to facilitate this process, Urban Tech conducted research to determine the impact which life skills training would have on the value that youths place on their lives, their education, and their futures. Urban Tech utilized New York State mandated life skills for youth in foster care as a resource to develop the necessary skills for independent living and work published in 1991 by the US Department of Labor in a report "What Work Requires of Schools", also known as the SCANS report, which cautioned that students must develop a new set of foundation skills and competencies such as interpersonal skills, individual responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity to be productive employees.

In January 1996, Urban Tech and Concord Family Services, a foster care agency in Brooklyn, NY, launched an after-school program with funding from AT&T, Chase Manhattan Bank and Con Edison to provide extensive life skills for the at-risk

population at Concord Family Services as well as computer literacy and on-line academic tutoring. Urban Tech organized its life skills instruction around building blocks (Character Education, Leadership Development, Healthy Living, and Education Planning) for character development and positive youth outcomes. The character development curriculum was taught in small groups for maximum sharing and participation, and supported by staff, parents and mentors from the community. Urban Tech named the program "The Youth Leadership Academy" (YLA).

With a grant from the Department of Commerce in 1996, Urban Tech was able to expand its computer curriculum to include web publishing, internships in local businesses, and home computers for continual mastery of skills taught in the program. In the summer of 1996, fifty-five (55) youth were offered the newly enriched curriculum – an integrated character education and computer program consisting of 120 hours of classroom instruction and 60 hours of on-the-job training. Urban Tech hired eight (8) students from Dartmouth College for the summer, and provided a four (4) week staff development program to prepare them to teach YLA.

From 1997 to 1999, Urban Tech implemented YLA in partnership with the State of Florida with first-time juvenile offenders, in Los Angeles with the Urban League, and in New York City in four Beacon schools. The program in Florida expanded five-fold and was successful in transitioning approximately 1000 youth from a life of crime to academic achievement and community service. In New York City, 3000 youth in foster care and special education programs have successfully completed YLA, and many have become achievement-oriented students with a strong work ethic. YLA received national recognition in the International Journal of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (Volume 8, Number 2-1997) as a "model for bringing

technology and training to people in inner cities and remote rural areas". The Department of Commerce also cited YLA as an exemplary program, and in 1999, the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) featured YLA in the film "Virtual Equality" produced by Studio Miramar.

In 2000, Urban Tech developed YLA in digital media so that it could be distributed via the Internet with the following features and benefits:

- Youth-friendly character education components and values-based academic and computer curriculum to prepare youth for 21st century jobs and opportunities;

- Easy replication and distribution of YLA's innovative life skills and character education curriculum to thousands of schools and community-based organizations and millions of youth at home;

- A management system called Apollo (A Portfolio of Life Skills and Learning Outcomes) that can be accessed by a "click of the mouse" by teachers, parents and caregivers for building student portfolios, tracking attendance and test scores, and measuring character and social development;

- Distance learning for staff development and effective distribution of course upgrades to keep training material current and "cutting edge."

Montclair High School's Adoption of YLA

The Montclair High School (MHS) administration was first introduced to the YLA and Urban Tech in 1999 by a business and community leader in Montclair. In 2001, the administration of Montclair High School (MHS) selected YLA as a core curriculum for its special needs population and agreed to participate in a pilot that

included the redesign of their current curriculum, and the inclusion of Urban Tech's professional development program. Eight full time teachers, 6 teaching assistants, and two administrators were trained. In the fall of 2001, MHS focused on developing knowledgeable teachers comfortable with using technology in the classroom and building the technological capacity in the high school to support a technology-driven curriculum. Beginning February 2002, the MHS educated the first cohort of 75 students. In March 2002, the project began its outreach to parents that included home and community connection.

The YLA staff at Urban Tech worked throughout the pilot with the MHS school administration and teaching staff to align the YLA curriculum with the themes and goals of MHS and the school district. These include supporting the development of small learning communities and focusing on critical areas of learning and teaching: multi-ability classrooms, multiple forms of assessment, parent involvement, technology integration, culturally responsive teaching, differential instruction, and guidance and counseling.

Each YLA learning component was integrated into daily classroom instruction by a youth-oriented and engaging animation episode and interactive group discussion. This included brainstorming sessions to address daily challenges, simulation to teach students how to make responsible decisions in the workplace, role-playing and debates to build critical thinking skills, and a culminating community development project.

The YLA curriculum was outlined and described in detail in the YLA Curriculum Guide, and the sequencing and scheduling was outlined in the YLA Administrative Guide. A variety of educational computer applications are infused

throughout the sequence (web page design, simulations, telecommunications, spreadsheets, word processing, graphics, and so forth); and the academic content was integrated resulting in a seamless, comprehensive and project-based classroom instruction with curriculum materials rooted in character education.

YLA's Curriculum

Character Development

- Building Trust and Respect: Create an environment for learning and sharing ideas; Foster teamwork and collaboration.

- Caring: Learn the value of reaching out and helping others; Exercise self-affirmation and the affirmation of others; Learn how to build relationships; Appreciate diversity.

- Responsibility: Learn to weigh options, assess risks, draw conclusions and take responsibility for one's actions; Learn to practice self-control and discipline; Learn strategies for resisting peer pressure.

Leadership Training

- Civic Virtue and Citizenship: Understand the role of the community; Learn the value of community service and civic engagement; Understand how leadership leads to constructive change in the community.

- Justice and Fairness: Examine ethical issues and choices; Become aware of the positive and negative consequences of one's actions; Practice steps for conflict resolution; Learn to make responsible decisions.

Healthy Living
- Drug and Alcohol Prevention: Become aware of the dangers of alcohol and substance abuse.

- Nutrition and Exercise: Learn to maintain a balanced diet and regular exercise; Become aware of how to manage stress.

- Personal Appearance: Improve personal hygiene; Understand how personal appearance affects self-esteem and how others perceive us; Learn to project confident and positive body language.

- Sexuality and Family Planning: Understand the risks of having sex and the responsibilities of teen pregnancy; Learn the facts about the transmission, prevention and treatment of AIDS and STDs.

Educational Planning*:*

- Goal Setting: Set goals for academic achievement and take personal responsibility for one's learning.

- Career Planning: Assess one's personal interests and aptitudes; Weigh the consequences of educational decisions; Map out a career path; Develop a plan for actualizing goals to become a successful employee and productive citizen.

- Financial Planning: Understand the pitfalls of credit cards and other debt; Learn to create a budget to keep track of money; Engage in discussions on ethical issues; Learn to make responsible financial decisions.

YLA's Interactive Interface

In all phases of the program, participants interacted using YLA's Interface that encourages participation and feedback, and provides experiential learning through the following activities on the Interface:

- ***"On the Reel"*** – consists of animated movies that introduce YLA participants to important life skills. In each movie, a specific challenge is

raised, examined and resolved by virtual peers – four (4) teenagers who face the same issues as the teens in the YLA program.

- *"Break it Down"* – replays portions of the animation as a launching point for group discussion. This activity teaches YLA participants how to identify problems, weigh various options, assess risk, and draw conclusions. Participants become active listeners and effective communicators of their views and ideas. They are able to give feedback on YLA relevance to their lives, and the effectiveness of the curriculum in helping them build character and leadership.

- *"Write to the Point"* – allows participants to express their ideas and views in an electronic journal. This activity increases fluency and the production of ideas; increases organization and structuring; increases grammar and editing skills. Through Apollo, YLA's enrollment and student tracking system, instructors can access and grade participant e-journal writing samples using a criterion-based measurement scale consistently throughout the program. All e-journals are stored in a portfolio viewable by program instructors and participants; providing a living record of experiences in the program.

- *"We Got Game"* – takes the lesson to a physical plane allowing participants to act on the topic and integrate the lesson experientially through floor games, role–playing, and "what if" exercises. We Got Game teaches teens how things fit together and how to plan and complete tasks. Participants also learn to trust and work collaboratively in groups.

- "*Final Answer?"* measures retention without feeling like a test. All results are scored automatically by Apollo and recorded in the participant's portfolio

so that regular progress reports are available with the click of a mouse. This component also employs self-evaluative questionnaires that raise students' awareness of their individual styles and preferences that play an important role in their character development and maturity. For example, the Learning Styles Questionnaire helps students discover what type of learner they are – visual, auditory, tactile – and learn study skills that are most successful for their type of learner. The Conflict Resolution Styles Questionnaire helps students to discover what type of conflict resolution style they tend to employ, and to learn strategies appropriate for their styles in order to adopt more constructive approaches to resolving conflicts.

- *"Hot Link Library"* encourages further exploration of the character education and life skills topic by linking to relevant content on the World Wide Web selected by teachers and Urban Tech development staff. Participants develop online research skills and further develop their writing abilities by searching for new web sites on the relevant character education topic, and then articulating in writing why they feel it should be added to the Library. Like the Write to the Point e-journal, this writing exercise is stored in Apollo, assessed by the instructors and viewable in the participant's portfolio.

Classroom Implementation

A typical lesson plan begins with one of YLA's animation series introducing the students to messages with a mix of humor and drama. The animation series, called *On-the-Reel*, is designed as a threaded narrative featuring four teenage

characters, dealing with the same issues and challenges as the youth in the YLA program.

The animation is immediately followed by *Break It Down*, transforming the interface into a white board for group discussion of the challenges just faced by the teenage characters in *On-The-Reel.* Students are encouraged to participate aloud as issues are framed by the teacher in the classroom. Participants further have the opportunity to reflect privately at home in a text-input field called *Write to the Point*. These journal entries are then submitted online, becoming part of each student's YLA portfolio.

The YLA interface transforms once again, taking students into *We Got Game*, which is a series of games and exercises directed by a facilitator or classroom teacher, and used to internalize and practice the lesson at hand. All material is then reinforced by *Final Answer?* Scores are submitted automatically and stored in portfolios for reference and reporting. The final section, a *Hot Link Library*, invites participants and facilitators to further explore the subject matter at hand, with select resources external to the curriculum -- in particular, hyperlinks to related source documents and content on the Worldwide Web.

Providing Technical Resources: Solving Access Problems with Support from TEAM and the United Way

While the YLA curriculum is specifically designed to support students to become achievers, YLA also addresses the important need to involve community organizations and families in the education of Montclair students by bringing the community into the classroom and the classroom into the community. Urban Tech

worked closely with leaders in the community to coordinate existing "digital divide" efforts with YLA. In addition to installing a state-of-the-art lab at the school with its own Internet access and high-speed ISP line for 100% availability of the web-based, interactive YLA functionality, a state-of-the-art computer lab was also installed at the local United Way to provide training for parents and vocational training for students to certify and prepare them for PC repair jobs. By the end of the school year, eleven (11) students had been involved in the PC repair program. Twelve (12) students and their parents had also received Internet-connected PCs for home, fully loaded with systems and applications software and Internet access. They have also received home computers at the United Way through the "gifting program.

Montclair Parents - Twelve (12) student families have received or been "gifted" with a home computer. Initial family response has been very positive and has begun to indicate the development of a quality difference in the relationship of students and their families. One of the parents stated how fabulous it is for her son to teach her how to use their home computer to locate resources on the Internet, to send and receive email, and to write with Word 2000.

CURRENT IMPLEMENTATION

For the 2002-2003 academic school year, the YLA curriculum is being implemented in two self-contained special education classrooms and in the high school alternative program. A total of five teachers are currently using the program in their English and Technology classes. In the two special education self-contained classrooms, instruction is delivered through a team teaching approach and is supported by the presence of teaching assistants. In the alternative program

classroom, in contrast, the teacher teaches alone. Classes are scheduled in the YLA lab on a period basis. The lab is equipped with a computer and workstation for each student, and provides ample storage space for relevant instructional materials and supplies.

The five teachers in the program vary in their experience working with special education student populations. At least two of the teachers could be considered veteran teachers in the field. Most of the teachers are relatively new to the high school with the average length of tenure in the school around 5 years.

Table 2 provides a profile of each of the three classrooms. As can be seen be seen in Table 2, there is a mix of classifications in each of the classrooms, and the classrooms are heterogeneously grouped by grades with a 2 level grade span. Of the 46 students in the program, almost half of the students are classified as emotionally disturbed.

Table 2: Profile of YLA Integrated Classrooms

Classroom	Grade Level	Number of Students with an Emotionally Disturbed Classification	Number of Students with a Special Learning Disability Classification	Total Number of students	Content Area in which YLA is Integrated
A: Self-contained special education	11 & 12	17	8	25	English & Technology
B: Self-contained special education	9 & 10	8	6	14	English & Technology
C: Alternative Program with some classified students	11 & 12	-	-	7	Technology
Total		25	14	46	

ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTIONS

The perceptions of those responsible for administering a program, and for providing support to school personnel whose tasks are to implement program activities, are important to understanding program outcomes. To this end, as intimated earlier, a group interview was held with the Department Chairperson of Special Education, The technology support teacher, and the Curriculum Coordinator. The discussion with the administrative staff was important in providing a broader context of past curricular and instructional practices in which the current program could be implicated. Moreover, their insights into current program activities were perceived to be beneficial to understanding implementation issues and the degree to which program goals are being realized.

According to information gleaned from the interview, prior to the adoption of YLA, the self-contained component of the special education program confronted many challenges, not least of which was instability in staffing. This was particularly acute in those classrooms serving students with an emotionally disturbed classification. Compounding this problem was a larger curricular and instructional issue- the absence of a structured and coherent program that could be used to engage students in meaningful learning experiences. Instruction, rather than being informed by a common set of materials and framework, was based on a variety of materials purchased from various vendors. The degree to which these materials complemented each other was questionable. Thus, although teachers held high expectations for students, and worked diligently to coordinate the variety of materials, the instructional environment often times was fraught with difficulties. This sometimes, hindered the materialization of these expectations. Exacerbating a

rather difficult instructional environment were the attitudinal and behavioral challenges which teachers of classified students confront.

It is against this backdrop that the district decided to adopt YLA. The YLA Program was viewed as a potential vehicle to support the desire to implement innovative ways of engaging students and providing teachers with alternative pedagogic strategies. Furthermore, the skills, dispositions, and knowledge, which students could potentially acquire from the program, were perceived to be attractive attributes with great possibilities for easing the transition from school to work for this special population

Inarguably, one of the most positive ways in which implementation unfolded was the opportunity provided to the school staff to review, examine, and to help map out the natural integration of the YLA modules into the curriculum. The administrative staff was unanimous in their agreement that this process helped to cultivate interest and excitement for the pilot program. They cited examples of how the themes, skills, and processes were identified for integration into the existing curriculum.   For instance, they noted that teacher input and Urban Technology's willingness to accommodate this input proved invaluable to ensuring that the program became congruent with their student population's needs. They illustrated this by noting the changes that were made to the racial background of one of the animated characters. This character was initially Hispanic, but given the demographics of the school, Urban Technology, on the basis of the staff's suggestion, changed the character's racial affiliation to Caucasian.

As a program that occurs in a multimedia rich environment, the effective delivery of YLA is highly contingent upon a faculty with a measurable degree of

comfort with technology. This level of comfort did not exist among teachers prior to the program's adoption. In fact, there was minimal integration of technology into both the curriculum and instruction prior to the program's implementation. Moreover, teachers were provided with very little technology training, which contributed to their feelings of anxiety about using technology. However, in spite of their initial temerity in embracing a program so heavily dependent on technology, the training provided by Urban Tech was viewed to be very instrumental in moving teachers from novice users to intermediate or expert users in some cases. Indeed, the administrative staff noted, that once teachers' comfort with technology improved, their motivation for the program increased.

A critical factor identified by the team to ensuring teacher buy-in to the program was the reassurance provided by Urban Tech that the program was not a supplant for good and effective teaching. This was reinforced by the concerted attempts to naturally blend the YLA curriculum with the core content standards. These standards form the cornerstone of instruction in the school and the state as well. Overall, the administrative team agreed that the program has met their expectations. They note, for example, an increase in teacher and students' motivation, an enriched integrated curriculum, a greater degree of teacher collegiality, and a burgeoning community of learners among faculty.

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTIONS OF YLA CLASSROOM

OBSERVATIONS

This section of the report presents the results from the classroom visitations. Regardless of how promising a program may be, it is how that program gets routinized into daily teaching and learning that the strongest evidence of its potential to add substantively to student knowledge can be obtained. Thus, it is important, from an evaluation viewpoint to raise such questions as: What does instruction look like? How are students engaged in the learning process? What are the nuances of the classroom environment? The following discussion captures the answers to these questions. It starts with narrative descriptions of each of the classrooms and concludes with a summary of our impressions.

Classroom A

As the observers entered the classroom, the team of teachers and assistants who were assigned to the classroom greeted them. The students were at individual workstations strategically placed along the classroom's perimeter. The unit of study underway addressed "Community Involvement." Students were required to role-play the part of a Town Hall Representative. They were then asked to write an E-journal entry addressed to their constituents indicating a problematic community issue and a plan for resolution, which they felt would gain consensus as a merit-worthy plan. The teacher assuming the lead instructional role stressed the adage, "If you are not part of the solution, then you are part of the problem," to communicate to the student participants the importance of community involvement.

To stimulate students' interest in their selected topics, the teacher reviewed at the front board with students the three most problematic community issues that were

identified in the survey that was conducted during the past Friday's introductory class. Drug and alcohol abuse, lack of positive things for youths to do, and the rising cost of rent were identified. Students were encouraged to select from this list the topic that was of personal concern to them.

The second teacher used the LCD projector and highlighted from the YLA program module the necessary framework for the task at hand. The teacher used "The Break It Down," and the "Write to the Point" segments to introduce the class assignment. The teacher reviewed the components and introduced a representative sample of an E-Journal entry that addressed: the individuals with common problems, the community location where the need was most obvious, a plan of merit, and the desired outcome. As students worked independently on their entries both team teachers and supportive teacher aides circulated throughout the room to aid the students' progress. During the change of periods, students were asked to save their files to floppy disks and to open their computer proficiency books to page 84. Students' needs to go to the bathroom and for nurse visitations were accommodated during this transition period.

The second period was dedicated to student writing. A previously assigned reflection literary assignment entitled "Everyday Heroes," was the targeted activity. Students were required to convey their "Everyday Heroes" in their writing by using referents such as "9ll, great influence, and significant difference." The team of teachers reviewed with the students the three-paragraph model to employ and reminded them of the word competencies that they should illustrate in their final document. Students were quite receptive to the team teachers' helpful input as they crafted their literary piece for the remainder of the classroom period. The modules

"Break it Down" and "Write to the Point" activated the students' knowledge and provided them with a scaffold that maintained their active engagement.

Classroom B

As the observers entered the classroom, they were informed that the YLA component would not be demonstrated during the first period. Students were asked to sit in the class setting formation rather than at workstations for the English portion of the lesson. As the twelve students entered the classroom, the teacher handed the teaching assistant a student activity packet which contained a reading sample entitled "Spike Lee"; two questions assessing students' understanding of the story, a vocabulary identification matching exercise, and a series of statements testing students' abilities to identify various analogies. The teacher assistant then left the room briefly to photocopy packets for all students. During her absence, one of the classroom teachers, through guided questioning, facilitated students' discussion to assess their familiarity with the character, and their knowledge of the meaning of the work "reparation."

Upon the teacher assistant's return, the teacher quickly distributed the student packets and students were required to read the passage. Both teachers and the teaching assistants were aware of the range of students' abilities and circulated to those students who required "one-on-one" assistance. Students were guided in their vocabulary identification to use the tools available to them (i.e., word in the context of the sentence used; or to go to their computer workstations and use a search engine to help define the word in question). There was a natural infusion of the tools of technology into the lesson.

After providing students with enough time to complete the packet, both teachers reviewed the students' findings. Students' definition of the words "phenomenon, witnessed, expulsion, tenacious, controversial, status, tone, hostility, meager, and profoundly" was assessed. Both the main idea and an inference of the story were identified. Students also established several analogies.

Using the LCD projector, the teacher introduced students to the YLA module, "Maria Moves In." The teacher was very pleased when students connected the module to their experience of working in new teams. Students received accolades for their contributions and for the wonderful connection illustrated. Using the "Break It Down" YLA module, the teacher team jointly helped students to identify working definitions of targeted vocabulary words such as "motivate, obligation, compelled, prestige, fulfillment, tangible, and altruism." Through guided questioning and word usage in context, the teachers effectively facilitated students' establishment of working definitions. Students were appreciative and respectful of their peers' opinions and were subsequently commended by their teachers for valuing the opinions of others.

After raising a series of questions that engaged students in an analysis of the moving situation and the vocabulary expressed, the teacher team moved students to the "Write to the Point" segment of the module. Students were required to write in their E-journals a paragraph containing five or more sentences that expressed a story of "a time when they were motivated to work on a team." As students constructed their five-sentence paragraph, the teachers and their assistants circulated to each of them to provide appropriate guideposts and to pose questions so as to strengthen their written assignment. Students successfully completed the

assignment and then were offered the opportunity to work on the PowerPoint slide presentations currently underway. The teachers' enthusiasm and their interactions with each other complemented lesson delivery.

Classroom C

The classroom teacher confirmed that the majority of the YLA Program modules were currently being incorporated during the reading and language arts component of the students' daily curriculum. On the other hand, students were required to visit the Urban Tech Center for the YLA modules that were infused into the mathematics curriculum. Six students were engaged in a spirited dialogue with the classroom teacher as the observers entered the classroom. The unit of study was "What is a Job?" Through the use of guided questions, newspaper advertisements, and a student dictionary, which was placed amongst the students, the teacher elicited from students their working definitions of the concept. Students were asked to share examples of the jobs they had undertaken to date. The next question was "What is a Career?" Students agreed to utilize the dictionary definition of the concept.   Students were required to copy the definition into their notes, namely, "a career is a profession for which one trains and which is undertaken as a permanent calling."   Students were asked if many jobs could define someone's career, and/or whether someone might actually have more than one career. Students were eager to share their knowledge and opinions on the issue. Using the previous discussions as a springboard, students were finally asked: "What is a Resume?" A sample resume was distributed to the class. Using the sample, the instructor developed with the students the key components represented.

As a transition tool and to ensure students comfort level with the upcoming task of developing their personal resumes, the instructor used a representative newspaper ad for a position, and then highlighted the nature of the position advertised and the prerequisite skills for employment consideration. The teacher also described how the students' last computer experience of utilizing a spreadsheet might assist them in the development of their personal resumes. This smooth transition eased students to their workstations to accomplish their tasks. This classroom experience reflected the natural infusion of the YLA program into the curriculum thereby maximizing student participation and increasing the availability of resources and materials within the classroom setting.

Summary Of Classroom Observations

The ensuing discussion summarizes the impressions that we have gleaned from the classroom visitations. The discussion is structured around the three major domains of Danielson's framework on which we based our observations. First, with respect to designing knowledge work, we found that most of the activities fell into either the proficient or distinguished categories of the framework. For example, we found that all the materials and resources that were in the classrooms supported the instructional goals and engaged students in meaningful learning. We also observed a fairly even progression of the learning activities. These activities were not only suitable for the students and the instructional goals on which they were based, but they also reflected recent professional research. However, the classrooms did vary in the degree to which the structure of the lessons was uniformly maintained. Not-with-standing- this observation, we found the time allocations for students to complete the learning activities to be reasonable.

With respect to Domain 2- organizing the environment for knowledge- we found that teacher- student interactions were warm, with students demonstrating respect for the teachers and teachers being highly responsive to student needs. Similarly, we found students in the LAB to be generally polite and respectful of each other.   The YLA teachers in their delivery of instruction conveyed to students the importance of the content; and in some instances, the teachers' enthusiasm provided a stimulus that motivated students.   In all the classrooms observed, the students accepted the teachers' insistence on high quality work, and most students remained on task during our observations. Without exception, we found that the expectations for learning and achievement were high, and that the instructional goals, activities and interactions were congruent with these expectations.

As stated in the previous paragraph, we observed most students to be engaged in learning for most of the duration of our presence in the classroom. The structuring of the learning activities helped to facilitate this.   However, in some instances, a few students hindered transitions from one learning activity to another. Given the student population served by the program, these occurrences were understandable. Nevertheless, little instructional time was loss when students had to get supplies, or when they had to perform other non-instructional activities such as, going to the bathroom or visiting the nurse. In addition, we found that the teaching assistants made a significant contribution to the classroom environment. We were impressed with how the arrangements of the lab advanced teaching and learning, and how skillfully teachers made use of all the resources and materials at their disposals.   In all, we found the culture of learning that was promoted in the YLA classrooms to be very positive.

With respect to the Domain 3- facilitating knowledge work, the team – teaching approach incorporated into the program helped teachers to not only provide directions and procedures that preempted students 'misunderstandings but also to provide feedback to students in a timely manner.   The quality of questioning, discussion techniques employed, and student participation were all noteworthy. We saw evidence of teachers using high quality questioning and giving students adequate time to respond. We also observed teachers trying to successfully engage all students in discussion by using a lot of positive affirmations. To varying degrees the representation of content to students' knowledge and experiences was skillfully attained. Indeed, many students remained cognitively engaged in the activities and in their exploration of the content. Generally, we found that the YLA classrooms provided an instructional climate that engaged students in learning with many of the elements subsumed under the third domain to be either proficient or distinguished (Refer to Appendix A for an overview of the domains and elements).

GROUP INTERVIEWS WITH YLA TEACHERS

In order to augment our visits to the YLA classrooms, a focus group discussion with the YLA teachers was conducted. The information that we obtained from this discussion, coupled with that obtained from the administrative team, as well as our classroom visits have helped to deepen our understanding of the program. In order to be parsimonious and to provide a coherent structure to the data, all the responses are discussed based on the major themes that surfaced. The following discussion presents the salient themes that emerged from the focus group data.

The teachers' assessments of students' motivation prior to the program's implementation were consistent with that held by the program administrative team.

According to the teachers, prior to the implementation of the YLA program, students were not motivated to learn; they had difficulty focusing on their schoolwork, and participated minimally in classroom activities.   In addition, there was a high student absenteeism rate, and classes were frequently cut. Overall, students were viewed as experiencing high levels of alienation from school that found expression in their negative behaviors.   Although the teachers acknowledged that students did possess some rudimentary computer skills prior to the program's implementation, they noted that these skills were not necessarily applied for educational purposes, neither were they utilized in positive ways. One teacher with a history in the school indicated that at one time the school had attempted to implement a computer program for its special education population.   However, staffing issues, a lack of focus, and problems of coordination all resulted in the program's demise.

With regards to their own level of technology competence, the teachers were quite candid about their skills. With the exception of one teacher who has had experience teaching computer courses within a school setting, most had no direct experience in using technological applications in the delivery of instruction. This is not to imply that the teachers lacked any familiarity with technology. Indeed, one teacher who had spent many years in the business field noted that he did have some technology background, but that this background was not congruent with, nor easily transferred into a teaching and learning environment.

The teachers concurred that the training provided by Urban Tech, contributed significantly to their comfort in using the YLA curriculum. Of particular interest, is their observation that the presence of another teacher in the classroom did much to ease their anxiety about the program. This was particularly true for those teachers in

the focus group who were less confident about their computer skills. These teachers stressed that working collaboratively with another teacher who was more computer literate than them was extremely beneficial, especially when they felt diffident about an activity. Teachers therefore valued greatly the team-teaching that occurred in the program, and stated this was an essential component to ensuring the program's success.

However, when asked what planning time there was for teaches to collaboratively plan instruction; the responses were varied. From the tenor of the responses it appeared that teachers capitalized on whatever available time or incidental contacts, which they had with each other to coordinate their activities. It was clear that no planning time was formally built into the schedule for collaboratively planning. This is an obvious area in need of redress, given the importance of the team teaching concept in the program.

Teachers were very honest in their identifications of some of the challenges that they face in the program. For one, the team teaching approach has created some difficulties for both students and teachers. At the inception of the program, students were reluctant to be guided in their instruction by a teacher other than their own classroom teacher. Teachers stated that they had to work hard to erode this initial resistance by stressing almost daily that both teachers represented a team, and that it was inconsequential who taught them in the lab. Teachers also spoke to the difficulties they experience in getting some students to participate in the group discussions and to engage in the writing tasks. These students as we have stated previously, have various emotional and learning needs, which are strong contributory factors to their reluctance to get involve in classroom discussions.

For some students, as one teacher noted, an issue may cause some discomfort, especially if those students have had some prior negative experience. Moreover, some of the special education students may be reluctant to talk in class because of introverted attitudes. Classroom discussions then have a tendency to elapse into a soapbox for some students and a stumbling block for others. All agreed that in these instances, it becomes the responsibility of the teacher to motivate and affirm those students who disengage from the discussions. There was general unanimity among the teachers that most students have shown progress in their work and involvement in the classroom discussions. Moreover, they all agreed that the YLA program has given these students the much-needed exposure to technology that is important for bridging the gap between school and the world of work. The teachers were fairly optimistic that their students would be graduating with skills that could help them secure employment once they enter the labor market.

Concerning the animations, teachers felt that some were more appropriately taught at earlier levels such as in middle schools. One teacher felt that the written form sometimes did not match the maturity levels of the students in the program. She stated that in spite of their academic challenges these students were savvy. Hence, animations like the ice-cream incident that focused on a conflict resolution issue did not resonate as strongly with her class, as a more mature clip might have done.

Teachers provided very little insights into parental involvement, with the exception of those parents whose children were part of the gifting program. In this case they shared how excited both student and parents were upon receipt of the

computers and the program's plans to build additional parental components into the program.

STUDENT OUTCOMES

Ultimately, it is how a program impacts student learning, behavior, and motivation to succeed that determines its success. As we stated in our introduction, the student data is coming at the end of the first semester. This is insufficient time to measure program impact given the fact that only three months of instruction would have occurred. Therefore, we are treating this data as baseline data that can be subsequently used to measure progress throughout the academic year.   The data collected on students fell into three categories: attitudes and predispositions, academic outcomes, and behaviors (attendance).

Student Attitudes

A survey was group administered to participating students. The survey consisted of a 28-item likert scale, a ten-item measure of student response to the various components of the YLA program, a measure of cultural capital, and basic demographic information such as grade and gender. Twenty students responded to survey. The sample includes only students in the self-contained classrooms. (Students in the alternative program are not included in the data.) This number represents about 51% of the classified students being served by the program.

Scholars have argued that in order to improve student chances of being successful in school, educators must increase their acquisition of cultural capital. Cultural capital is a broad concept that refers to, among other things, students' access to books, computers, and exposure to the cultural forms that are most valued in schools. Given the focus of the YLA program, we attempted to measure students'

access to computers at home. The data indicates that excluding the students who received a computer through the YLA program, approximately 58% of the students have access to a computer at home. Through the YLA program that number increases to 79%. Interestingly however, there were some students who noted that although they do have access to a computer at home, they do not use the computer.

Of those students who do use the computers in their homes, few use them for school purposes. For example, only 23% stated that they use their home computers to do research for school assignments, and similarly 27% noted that they use them to type school assignments. An equally minuscule percent, 27% indicated that they use their home computer to frequently email their friends. The most frequent activity is Internet use. Fifty-six percent indicated that they use their home computers frequently to visit the web.

Academic and General Self-Concepts

The likert scale allowed us to measure several important attitudes to include students' feelings about computers, their academic self-concept and general self-concept. Two subscales were derived: an academic self-concept (ASC) scale that consisted of 5 items and a general self-concept scale (GSC), which also consisted of 5 items. The reliability coefficient for the academic self-concept scale was .77 and for the general self-concept scale. 69. The correlation between both scales was .77. This suggested that students who had a positive academic self-concept also tended to feel good about themselves in general. Table 3, presents a series of zero order correlations between these two aspects of students' self concept and other variables in the study.

Table 3: Correlation Between Academic Self-Concept, General Self-Concept and Selected Variables

Variables	Academic Self-Concept	General Self-Concept
Enjoy working on computers	.86*	.63*
Feel teachers care about them	.67*	.43
Gender	.45	.43
Grade level	-.37	-.10

Note: * denotes statistical significance

The variable that shares the strongest association with both academic and general self-concepts is enjoyment working with computers. The correlations furnished in the Table reveal that a student's level of enjoyment with working with computers strongly influenced his or her academic self-concept. The more a student enjoyed working with computers the more likely he or she was to hold a positive view about his or herself. Although, the association is somewhat weaker between enjoyment with working with computers and general self-concept, the direction of the relationship was similar to what was observed for academic self concept- that is- students' enjoyment with technology was likely to result in a more positive feeling about themselves in general. In fact this variable had the most consistent and strongest relationship with all of the other variables in the study.

For example, students who enjoyed working with computers were more apt to feel that their teachers care about them ($r = .58$), more prone to believe that learning is fun ($r = .55$), and more inclined to say that they take pride in their school work ($r = .65$). Moreover, these students tended to be more optimistic about their future ($r =$

.53). The correlation with their overall enjoyment working with the YLA program was

.58, suggesting that those students who enjoyed working with the YLA program were

likely to report a higher level of enjoyment working with computers. One could

hypothesize that the YLA program has impacted students' academic and general

self-concept because of the stimulation that it has fostered in technology. There is

some confirmation for this hypothesis as over 60% of students indicated that their

computer skills have improved this school year as compared to 31% who felt the

opposite.

Not surprisingly, students' academic and general self-concepts were also

positively influenced by their perceptions about how much their teachers cared about

them. The relationship was much stronger for their academic self- concept (r= .67)

than it was for their general self-concept (r = .43). Gender had a modest relationship

to both measures of self-concepts. Although not significant, females tended to have

more positive self-concepts than males. With respect to grade level, this variable

had no impact on student general self-concept and a minuscule relationship to

academic self-concept.

Feelings about the YLA Program

Tables 4 and 5 present students' feelings about the YLA program and their

assessment of how their skills have improved this academic year. Seventy-five

percent of the students feel that they have gotten better at expressing themselves.

With respect to their academic skills, as stated previously, 68% feel that their

computer skills have improved and 60% feel that they have become better writers.

Sixty percent of the students indicated that they like watching the animated clips, of

which 50% feel that they learn much from these clips. Students were more tentative in their opinions about whether the program has helped them in their interactions with peers.

Table 4: Students' Assessments of their Progress

Statement	Percent Agreeing	Percent Uncertain
I think I am becoming better at expressing my ideas	75%	15%
I think my computer skills have definitely improved this year	68%	26%
I like watching the animated clips	60%	15%
I think I am becoming a better writer	60%	25%
I feel I learn much from the animated clips	50%	25%
My YLA classes have helped me to better understand how to work with other students	36.9%	37%

Note: Number of students in the sample - 20.

Information provided by students allowed us to rank order their preferences for the learning activities associated with the various YLA learning modules. These activities include those associated with the acquisition of specific technology skills, as well as those that form the core of the life skills modules. Most students appear to enjoy working on those activities that involve the application of specific computer skills such as word-processing, doing power point presentations and utilizing the Internet. Of the various learning activities associated with the modules the top preferences were: We Got Game, Hot Link, On the Reel and Write to the Point. Not surprisingly students least preference was Final Answer- a TV like quiz.   Interestingly the teachers' observations about some students' reluctance to engage in discussions with their peers are borne out

by the data in the Table. As is evident, Break it Down is one of the least favorite activity. It should be pointed out that we are speaking of relative differences. Clearly from the data in the Table, almost three fourths of the students enjoy engaging in the Break it Down activity.

Table 5: Rank Ordering of YLA Activities Based on Student Preferences

YLA Activity	Percent Liking
Using Microsoft Word	95%
Using PowerPoint	95%
Working on the Internet	95%
We Got Game	84%
Hot Link Library	83%
On the Reel	79%
Write to the Point	79%
Break it Down	74%
Final Answer	63%

Academic and Behavioral Outcomes

In concluding our examination of student-related outcome data we now turn to measures of academic performance and attendance. We would to like reiterate the previously stated caveat that these data are being treated as benchmark indicators. For the current academic year, the only available data on students at this point are first marking period grades in English, World Literature, and Technology and the

number of unexcused absences.   Our analysis of this data is based on a sample of 42 students. We first begin with student absences.

The average number of days that students were absent from school without a legitimate excuse was 7.9 days. However, a breakdown of the data by gender reveals that female students were almost twice as likely to be absent than males. The average number of days that females were absent was 11.18, compared to 6.6 days for males. Students who were classified, as emotional disturbed were on average out of school 3.8 days more than students with special learning disabilities. For example, while students with a learning disability were out 6.9 days, students with an emotional disturbed classification were out on average 10.7 days. Older students were also more likely to be absent without an excuse than younger students. The mean days absent for both groups were 11.14 and 4.33 for older and younger students respectively. A cursory examination of absenteeism rates for the previous year indicates on average, rates that are much higher. However, because previous data on absenteeism is not available for all students we have elected to not report this data.

The distribution of grades reveal that over 78% of students earn a grade of "C" or higher in their YLA English class, 68% a "C" or higher in their YLA Technology class, and 50% earned a grade of "C" or higher for World Literature. In attempting to get a clearer picture of academic performance, we grouped students into two categories: those who earned a "B" or higher in one of their YLA classes, and those who earned a "C" or lower. The first group represents the top performing students, whose academic performance we wanted to explore more fully. Roughly, about a third of the students fell into the top category (approximately 15 students). Who are

these students?   For one they were equally distributed across the grade levels.

About two-thirds were males, and about 43 % were emotionally classified.   These

students were absent from school only 2.67 days as compared to 10.6 days for

those in the other group.

A breakdown of absenteeism rate by gender and achievement reveal that

males in the top achieving group tended to be out of school less than 1 day as

compared to other males who were absent 9.09 days (See Table 5).   Similarly,

females in the top group were absent about 10 days fewer than females not in the

top group.

Table 6: Number of Unexcused Absences by Achievement and Gender

ACH	Gender	Mean	Standard Deviation	Number
Top Grp:	Male	.89	1.36	9
	Female	5.80	3.96	5
Other Grp:	Male	9.09	8.6	21
	Female	15.67	10.39	6
Total	Male	9.09	8.16	30
	Female	15.67	9.31	11

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results garnered from the evaluation of the YLA program are highly suggestive that the program is making a significant contribution to student learning. This inference is derived from the variety of data sources that we used in the study. It is clear from both the administrators' and teachers' perspectives that the program has brought a much-needed structure to the teaching of important life skills and technology competencies to students. Moreover, the integration of these skills into other core academic areas has served to fashion a seamless relationship between character education and these disciplines. The favorable response of students to the program, especially those components that focus on building their technology competencies, augurs well for the program and others of similar focus. Student motivation about working on the computers and the significant effects which this has on their feelings about themselves as learners is encouraging, given the sense of alienation that existed among this population prior to the program's implementation.

The following recommendations are therefore offered for consideration as the program moves into a second year of implementation. First, a structured time for team teachers to meet and plan their instructional activities should be built into the program schedule. Second, future professional development activities focusing on how to stimulate and promote student engagement in discussing sensitive topics should be promoted. The students in the program have various emotional needs, and, as we have seen, some are reluctant to participate in classroom discussions. While this may be no different than what would normally occur in a non-special education classroom, classroom discussion is an integral component of the YLA curriculum. Given this, teachers should be provided with the necessary tools that

can help them to more effectively engage the reluctant student. Third, there is the need to track the performance of students in the program. Developing a longitudinal database that would follow students from their entry into the program until their transition to the world of work would help to provide additional confirmatory evidence on the program's success. As we noted earlier, teachers were very optimistic in their beliefs that this program would provide students with the skills that would be needed to secure gainful employment upon graduation. A follow-up study with graduates would allow us to test whether this optimism is indeed warranted.

Fourth, the problem of student absenteeism, while beyond the scope and purview of the program, is a challenge that the general administration of the school will have to address. Although the reasons for the excessive unexcused absences among various subgroups of pupils were not given, ways of reducing these absences need to be explored. The data culled from the student survey does provide some fruitful possibilities. For one, students' engagement with technology significantly influenced how they felt about themselves and their optimism about their future. The implication of this finding is that the district may want to closely examine the degree to which technology is being incorporated into the special education curriculum at the lower levels. Second, it may also want to explore the feasibility of implementing the YLA program, or a similar program at the upper grade levels in the middle schools. Students' disengagement with learning builds over time, and if left unchecked becomes difficult to reverse at the high school level.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX   A

EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

A1: Interview Guide for Administrative Team

Interview Questions for Montclair High School Administrators
YLA Program Evaluation

General Introduction:

Before I start talking about the YLA Project, I would like to get some background information on your Special Education Program as it existed prior to the adoption of YLA.

1) On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is low and 10 is high, how would you rate the level of academic expectations for special education students?

2) Using the same scale, how much emphasis was placed on the development of life skills in the curriculum?

3) With 1 representing no integration and 5 representing high degree of integration, how would you rate the degree of integration of technology into the curriculum and instruction?

4) How was technology used to enhance teaching and learning?

5) Describe the level of motivation that students had about learning?

6) How would you describe teacher comfort with using technology?

7) Using the scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is low and 10 is high, how would you rate the staff development opportunities for teachers around technology?

YLA Program

1) How did you first hear about the YLA Program?

2) What impact did you think it would have on your program?

3) Have you seen any of this impact yet?

4) What is different now that you have adopted the YLA program?

5) What feedback have you gotten from teachers about the program?

6) Have you observed the program in operation?

7) What can you tell me about what you have observed?

8) What are your views about the life skills that are embedded in the program?

9) This program has a number of potential benefits for students: tell me if you have seen any changes in students' behaviors for any of the following: 1) academics, 2) self-esteem, 3) technology interest, 4) attendance, 5) discipline? 6) classroom participation

10) What have been the biggest challenges that this program has faced?

11) How are teachers supported in the program?

12) Have you seen any changes in parental involvement that can be attributed to the program?

13) This program provides various opportunities for teacher growth. Have you seen any changes in any of the following teacher behaviors: 1) knowledge of technology, 2) knowledge on how to infuse technology into the curriculum; 3) changes in teacher pedagogy, 4) more effective use of technology with students, 5) more student- centered classroom environment, 6) more teacher collaboration

14) What has been the impact of the take-home computer component on home to school relations?

A2: Teachers Focus Group Questions

Introductory Questions

1) How long have you been a special education teacher?

2) What classifications do you teach?

3) How long have you been teaching in Montclair High School

4) What grade levels do you currently teach?

5) Have you always taught in a self-contained classroom?

Transition Questions

1) Prior to the adoption of YLA, how would you describe students' motivation towards learning?

2) Prior to the adoption of YLA, how would you describe students' interest in school?

3) Prior to the adoption of YLA, how would you describe students' comfort with technology?

4) Prior to the adoption of YLA, how would you describe parental interest in their children education?

Key Questions

1) How comfortable were you with using technology in the delivery of instruction prior to the implementation of YLA?

2) How comfortable are you with using the YLA technology?

3) How would you rate the support, which you have received in implementing YLA?

4) What difficulties if any, did you experience in implementing the program?

5) What are your opinions about the YLA curriculum?

6) Prior to YLA, how was character development taught?

7) Do you find that students get involved in the discourses generated by the video clips?

8) How do you think students have responded to the YLA program?

9) What aspects of the YLA program do you believe students enjoy the most?

10) Do you feel that the YLA program has allowed you to spend more time on teaching and learning?

11) Have you found that there are less disciplinary issues in your classroom?

12) How do you integrate the YLA curriculum in your teaching?

13) How comfortable are you with the Apollo Management System?

14) Have you found that your teaching has changed because of YLA?

15) Are you using technology much differently now?

Summary Questions

1)   Do you have any suggestions for strengthening the program?

A3: Student Survey

Dear Student,

We would like to know your feelings about the YLA Program. Please answer the questions as honestly as you can. You should not put your name on the survey. All answers will be treated confidentially. If you have any questions while you fill the survey out, please raise your hand and I will help you with your question.

Thank you for your cooperation,

Dr. Walker

- Example of how to fill the survey out.

If you strongly agree with the statement that adults should respect young people's music you would put a checkmark in the strongly agree box.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Adults should respect young people's music.	✔				

Part A: Your Feelings about the YLA Program

Please put a checkmark in the column that describes how you feel about the YLA program.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Using the computer in my YLA classes is scary for me.					
I enjoy working on the computers in my YLA classes.					
I wish all my classes were held in the computer lab.					
I like coming to school.					
I am not afraid to share my ideas in class.					
Some days I just don't feel like coming to school.					
If I want to find information, I know how to use the internet to get it.					
I like watching the animated clips in the YLA project.					
I think that I am becoming a better writer.					
Learning is fun					
I want to do well in school.					
I feel good about myself.					
I take pride in my schoolwork.					
I feel I learn much from the animated clips that I watch in the computer lab.					
I often have trouble understanding what I should do when I am in the computer lab.					
I feel shy talking in class.					
I think I can be anything I want to be when I graduate from school.					
I think I am getting better at expressing my ideas.					
My YlA classes have helped me to better understand how to work with other students.					

Part A: Your Feelings about the YLA Program   (Continued)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I think my computer skills have definitely improved this school year.					
I wish I knew how to better handle conflicts with my friend.					
I feel much better about myself this year.					
My teachers care about me.					
I think I am getting better at saying how I feel.					
I only use the computer in my YLA classrooms.					
It is important to me that my friends think I do well in school.					
I care that people think I am smart.					
I have friends in this school.					

Part B: Please indicate how much you like doing each of the following learning activities.

YLA Activity	Like a lot	Like	Like somewhat	Don't like	Definitely don't like
Watching 'On the Reel.'					
Participating in "Break it Down.'					
Write to the Point.					
Playing "We Got Game'.					
Taking the quizzes in 'Final Answer'.					
Using the "Hot Link Library'.					
Working on the Internet					
Using Microsoft Word					
Doing a Power Point presentation.					
Using the "Alicia Leary" Progress Foundation Simulation.					

Part C: Please tell us something about yourself.

A) What grade level are you in?

Grade 9 _____

Grade 10 _____

Grade 11 _____

Grade 12 _____

B) What is your gender?

Male _____

Female_____

C) Did you attend middle school in Montclair?

Yes _____

No _____

D) Do you have access to a computer at home?

Yes _____

No _____

Activity	Frequently do at home	Do sometimes	Don't do at all
Email			
Internet use			
Do research for school			
Build or manage your web page			
Type school assignments.			

F) Did you receive a gifted computer?

Yes_____

No_____

G) If yes, how much did you enjoy building your own computer?

A lot_____

Somewhat_____

Not too much_____

H) Do any of your family members use your computer?

Yes_____

No_____

A4: Classroom Observation Instrument

Domain 1: Designing Knowledge Work	U	B	P	D
a. Demonstrating Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy				
b. Demonstrating Knowledge of Students				
c. Selecting Instructional Goals				
d. Demonstrating Knowledge of Resources				
e. Designing Coherent Instruction				
f. Assessing Student Learning through Student-Generated Projects				
Domain 2: Organizing the Environment for Knowledge Work	**U**	**B**	**P**	**D**
a. Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport				
b. Establishing a Culture for Learning by Supporting of Beliefs, Vision, and Mission of Montclair Public Schools				
c. Managing Classroom Procedures				
d. Managing Student Behavior				
e. Managing Physical Space				
Domain 3: Facilitating Knowledge Work	**U**	**B**	**P**	**D**
a. Communicating Clearly and Accurately				
b. Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques				
c. Engaging Students in Work				
d. Affirming the Performance of Students				
e. Demonstrating Flexibility and Responsiveness Through Monitoring and Modifying the Work				

Extrapolated from the _Framework for Professional Practice,(Danielson, 1996)_
Note: U unsatisfactory, B Basic, P, Proficient, D, Distinguished

APPENDIX B

COMMENTS FROM THE MID-YEAR REPORT

The following testimonials from MHS staff indicate their reaction to the outcomes of the pilot.

"I am excited when I walk into classes and observe students with sustained focus, decreased impulsivity and involved in group discussions that address real life issues. YLA affords an opportunity for students to be fully immersed in an interactive, multi-sensory program that addresses both academic and technological curricula. Thank you, YLA!"

Shirleen Powell-Sanders, Special Education Department Chair
Montclair High School - Montclair, NJ

"Although I was profoundly skeptical at first, the YLA program has turned out to be an invaluable resource for my students. YLA keeps them interested and gets results – and it's a heck of a lot of fun. The interactive nature of the program makes it interesting and challenging for my students, many of whom are delving deeply inside themselves to creatively participate in this process, and coming away with new focus, energy, confidence and strength."

Ms. Christine Smith, Montclair High School Teacher
Montclair, NJ

"YLA is one of the more comprehensive programs for special education because it provides several essential components: life skills development, integration with academic education and motivation for self empowerment. I like all the aspects; the teacher training, its effect on students and parent inclusion in the program. It is very engaging and positive. The teachers' response has been commendable.

Elaine Davis, Principal
Montclair High School - Montclair, New Jersey