



# WHEN DOING GOOD IS GOOD FOR YOU: BROKERING FUTURE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES TO YOUTH AS A BI-DIRECTIONAL CO-LEARNING PRACTICE

Angela Calabrese Barton (University of Michigan)  
Dixie Ching, Rafi Santo, Chris Hoadley, & Kylie Pepler (Hive Research Lab)

## AUDIENCE

Informal/Ost Educators, Informal/Ost Educatio Directors, School-Partnership, Directors At Ost Organizations, School Administrators And Educators.

## WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

Successful brokering can help young people deepen their interests and their identities connected to those interests, as well as build their social capital by enriching their social networks with other adults and peers that are connected to or have knowledge of future learning opportunities.

Brokering might be thought of as support or knowledge flowing from the broker — an informal educator, classroom teacher, adult or peer mentor — to a young person. In this way, the young person learns from the adult in terms of possible futures and the opportunities and practices which may make those futures possible. However, brokers should also be learning from the young person to whom they are connecting opportunities. When individuals broker, they are interacting in crucial relationship-building that allow brokers to get to know the young person.

For educators to become effective brokers in ways that support equity goals, it is important to consider how **brokering is a bi-directional, co-learning practice**. Brokering is not only about connecting future learning opportunities to young people, but also about refining and expanding our mental models of young people, what matters to them, how and why, and the implications this has for their futures.

This perspective on brokering is built upon an assets-driven and “desire-based” framework, in refusal of “damage-centered research” (Tuck, 2009), which has for too long positioned youth from non-dominant communities as “in need of repair,” a strong narrative in education. What this means for brokering is that the process involves not only recognizing the needs of the young people with whom brokers work, but also being willing to see and learn from the assets — the experiences, knowledge, feelings, and relationships — that young people bring to the relationship. For example, young people may have ideas for contexts they want to be brokered into, and as adults, we need to learn from youth about these places so that we can use our position/authority to help them gain access to these places. For the brokering relationship to support equity-oriented goals, both the broker and the young person need to be willing to share and learn from one another.

## CASE STUDY: QUENTIN AND THE POWER-SUCKING PIG

Quentin is a smart, funny African-American sixth-grader who was part of an afterschool STEM club<sup>1</sup>, where he loved engaging in science topics and activities and helping others. However, at school, Quentin was often in trouble for being silly and as a result often spent “time out” in the hallway while his peers learned in the classroom. This was frustrating for Quentin because he felt that his humor helped him and others learn, and he missed science class, his favorite class of the day.

Partway through the school year, Quentin asked his afterschool STEM club teacher to help him share a video he had made in the club with his science teacher at school. The 60-second “public service announcement”-style video<sup>2</sup>, which took about 12 afterschool hours to make, featured Quentin dressed up with his friend as a “power sucking pig” in order to teach others about energy consumption and its connection to climate change. He wished for his video to be easy to understand and salient to his community so they could save money on their electricity bills while also helping the environment [video link]. Quentin wanted to bring his video to school so that his teacher would know “that I could do it. That I got it done. And that I know a lot....I’m not really that C and D person.”

For his afterschool club teachers, this was an important request because we did not know the extent to which Quentin felt that his humor, a strongly valued asset in the afterschool space, had made him become marginalized in school science. One of Quentin’s STEM afterschool teachers brought the video to school, along with some of Quentin’s other work related to the video to share with the teacher. Quentin’s school teacher was surprised in seeing this work, and reflected upon how he might better leverage Quentin’s humor at school. He also opted to share this work with Quentin’s other teachers so that they could, together, help to create a more empowering space for him at school. His teacher also reflected on how the movie reminded the teacher of why he went into teaching, in terms of caring about young people and what they might accomplish. He ultimately showed it to other teachers at the school.

Of this event, Quentin said, “It’s the movie that changed how people thought of me ... We showed people how they can save electricity, which will help with CO2.”

This case provided examples of:

- **Brokering Relationships:** Quentin and his afterschool STEM club teacher worked together to create new opportunities to be recognized in his school, which could in turn create new opportunities for learning.
- **Brokering Practices:** STEM club teacher 1) responded to Quentin’s desire to share his movie, 2) created an opportunity to talk with his science teacher and share his movie and other artifacts, and 3) helped Quentin’s science teacher develop a plan for how to support Quentin in school.
- **Co-Learning:** Quentin had new school opportunities open up to him where he could use his humor. He also learned the power of sharing out-of-school work with those at school. Quentin’s afterschool club teachers also learned more about how his humor (a powerful asset outside school) was working against his success in school.

<sup>1</sup> This STEM club was provided by the first author.

<sup>2</sup> <http://getcity.org/blog/2012/10/06/power-sucking-pigs/>



## APPROACHES TO CONSIDER

- Think about brokering as a process of learning about youth assets as well as their needs. Reflect on what young people might be teaching you when they talk about the challenges they face or the future opportunities they desire.
- Consider designing brokering practices that allow for an exchange of ideas between broker and young person.
- Value the competencies that youth come in with; interrogate what you value and why.
- Introduce a culture in your program or setting where all young people are encouraged to share and experiment with new identities (e.g., as experts, activated members of their community, mentors, learning risk-takers, etc.).
- Have brainstorming discussions with young people in deciding what new contexts and audiences to engage with. This may help adult brokers learn more about individuals in the community that they should be connected to.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What are the current relevant identities and dispositions of youth in my program?
- What identities and dispositions do I value and want youth to explore?
- What identities and dispositions do youth themselves value and want to explore?
- When have I learned something new about what a youth values that changed the kinds of learning opportunities I considered for them?

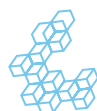
## REFERENCES

Ching, D., Santo, R., Hoadley, C., & Pepler, K. (2016). Not just a blip in someone's life: Integrating brokering practices into out-of-school programming as a means of supporting youth futures. *On the Horizon*, 24(3). pp. 296-312.

Tan, E. & Calabrese Barton, A. (2015). Identity pathways in and through STEM among youth from historically marginalized communities. Paper presented at the European Science Education Research Association Biannual Meeting. Helsinki, Finland.

Tan, E. & Calabrese Barton, A. (under review). Hacking a path in and through STEM: How youth navigate and transform the landscapes of STEM. Submitted to *Harvard Education Review*.

Tuck, E. (2009). Suspending damage: A letter to communities. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(3), 409-428.



HIVE RESEARCH LAB WAS MADE POSSIBLE THANKS TO THE  
GENEROUS SUPPORT OF OUR FUNDERS



FIND MORE  
PRACTICE BRIEFS:

[brokering.hiveresearchlab.org](http://brokering.hiveresearchlab.org)

HIVE RESEARCH LAB IS A PROJECT OF



*This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.*  
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/> [brokering.hiveresearchlab.org](http://brokering.hiveresearchlab.org)