



THE REMIX PROJECT

**HELPS DEVELOP
21ST CENTURY SKILLS
(THAT WILL REDUCE POVERTY)**

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INTRODUCTION

A few years ago, 400 hiring executives of major corporations were asked a very simple but significant question: “Are students graduating from school really ready to work?” The executives’ collective answer? Not really. The study clearly showed that students graduating from secondary schools, technical colleges, and universities are sorely lacking in some basic skills and a large number of applied skills:

- Oral and written communications
- Professionalism and work ethic
- Working in diverse teams
- Leadership and project management
- Critical thinking and problem solving
- Teamwork and collaboration
- Applying technology

The Conference Board et al., 2008

In order to create a generation of youth who succeed in work and in life, we need to invest in providing them with the skills and knowledge that are required in today’s rapidly changing world. In addition to academic subjects, there is an urgent need to provide young people with opportunities to develop the skills that will help them solve problems, work in teams, analyse knowledge, use technology, and communicate well with others, also known as 21st century skills.

Educators and business leaders have identified a gap in these essential skills among young people who have completed college or university. If this is the situation for those fortunate enough to attend post-secondary education, it is no wonder that youth from marginalized communities, with reduced access to education and training opportunities, are struggling to succeed in today’s job market.

The Remix Project is a free 6-month alternative education program for youth in the fields of creative arts, recording arts, photography, the art of film, and the art of business, where youth are mentored in practicing skills, gaining experience, establishing networks and accessing resources that will support them in pursuing education and/or developing a career in an industry they are passionate about. The program supports talented people who want to develop their art and/or business in order to make a living, whether or not they have been able to complete their education.

This report is the result of six months of data collection, observations and interviews with The Remix Project staff, participants and graduates by an external research and evaluation consultant. It is the second in a series of documents that identifies and assesses the extent to which The Remix Project addresses the evidence-based risk and protective factors for positive youth development including violence, poverty and mental health.

The report identifies how The Remix Project helps develop the following 21st century skills:

- Creativity, Critical Thinking, Collaboration, Communication
- Financial, Economic, Business and Entrepreneurial Literacy
- Technology
- Global Awareness



CREATIVITY

“Creativity is the most important leadership quality, according to CEOs. Creative leaders expect to make deeper business model changes to realise their strategies. To succeed, they take more calculated risks, find new ideas and keep innovating in how they lead and communicate.”

IBM CEO study

The Remix Project is an arts incubator that gives young people the space, resources and relationships to foster their creativity. Participants are provided with materials for visual arts, computers with design software, and access to a recording studio that enables them to work on a variety of creative projects.

When asked if they felt that the program helped them improve their artistic skills/creativity, 22/24 (92%) participants agreed that it had. Providing the space for young people to be together enables them to be inspired by others’ creativity, their successes and their struggles.

“Being put in a room full of creative people was really motivating and made me want to learn more, ask questions, and get more information. I got all of that from being in the same room as these people. It helped me with asking people’s opinions on my art and creativity.”

“Creativity allows you to be different. If you don’t have that you’re just going to be the same as everyone else. Sharing the space with other creative minds helped my creativity, overhearing other people talking, so many people passing through the space, being in that environment, you learn a lot – you’re exposed to it all in one building.”

“Remix gives me a time to be creative. If I’m at home I won’t get the same amount of stuff done. When I’m in this space where there’s other creative people, you see other peoples’ work and get inspired by that too.”

“When you’re at Remix, every moment here makes you want to come back. You can get away from everything, and seeing something that someone’s working on can give me an idea – it’s an infectious environment. It motivates you to keep doing your stuff. It’s like a support system.”

“Creativity opens your mind up to so many different worlds. There are so many different spirits in the room; so many different backgrounds, but we’re all there for the same goal. Hearing other people’s struggles and realizing that it’s not only you going through that.”



CRITICAL THINKING

"Arts education is critical to our kids' intellectual, physical and emotional growth. By studying dance, drama, media arts, music and visual arts, students learn to think more creatively and critically, and further develop the ability to work with others."

Former Ontario Education Minister Kathleen Wynne

"Jobs in the new economy--the ones that won't get outsourced or automated--"put an enormous premium on creative and innovative skills, seeing patterns where other people see only chaos."

Marc Tucker, President of the National Center on Education and the Economy

Critical thinking, 'thinking outside the box', or 'seeing patterns where other people see chaos' is a skill that helps us solve problems. Critical thinking involves being able to synthesize information, ask the right questions, and come up with solutions.

At The Remix Project, the learning is project-based, meaning that participants decide on a project, and work backwards to figure out how to complete the project – what research will need to be done, what skills will be required, materials that need to be collected, and relationships that need to be cultivated in order to achieve their goals (Seidel, S., 2011). For example, participants in the creative arts program who are studying journalism will research and analyze information on a particular topic in order to develop an article or a story, and identify and interview key informants. Participants in the business program are given an assignment to assess the merit of a business in terms of its marketing, branding, and finances. They are challenged to identify and critique the key messages that the business is trying to convey to the consumer, the mission statement, target audience, brand architecture, and assets, including analyzing whether or not it is a good business, and how they would do it differently. Getting personal and individualized feedback from program leaders also helps participants develop their own brands.

"Remix gives you the confidence to think outside the box. You have access to people you can bounce ideas off of and ask questions to figure out what works. You get hands-on attention – you're not in a class of 40 people – and you don't have to be afraid to ask questions because questions are encouraged."

"Remix helped me fine-tune what I wanted to do. If I had an idea, Remix helped me figure out how to make it happen."

"The 6 month plan changes your way of thinking. It was like a structured to-do list that lets you see what you need to do to accomplish your goals. Sometimes when you have a lot of aspirations, when you focus and put stuff down on paper, then you know what is the next. I saw what I needed to do to keep going towards my goal. Instead of just knowing where I wanted to be, I knew how to get there."



COLLABORATION

"Most innovations today involve large teams of people...We have to emphasize communication skills, the ability to work in teams and with people from different cultures."

Former Lockheed Martin CEO, Norman Augustine

"Copying or asking someone else at school is cheating; outside school it's collaboration."

Sir Ken Robinson

As a place where artists gather to work and achieve their goals, The Remix Project fosters collaboration. Graphic designers work with participants from the business program to develop logos and business cards, photographers work with clothing designers to develop portfolios of their work, journalists work with videographers to film a documentary, and audio engineers work with recording artists to produce songs. Remix's City Life film project also brings together a group of youth to write, direct and participate in creating films and documentaries. Participants work with a team of over 30 people including cinematographers, production designers, camera team, lighting technicians, electricians team, sound recorders, editors and production managers, in order to produce a film.

Of those participants who were surveyed, 23/24 (96%) agreed that they had opportunities to collaborate with other artists on projects. Participants also reported:

"I learned how to market myself better and I learned how to produce. I made a lot of good friendships and I finally made a team which was my primary goal in Remix."

"I've gotten a lot of experience in my field. Also have made some great connections with some of the other participants."

"Learned more about photography in general, and what my strengths are – what I'm good at. I was able to set up my own website and work with different people around Toronto. I've learned so much."

"I met the mentor I wanted to. I gained hands-on experience and learned a lot from them. Was able to connect with my peers and discuss ideas."

COMMUNICATION

“No one’s going to listen if they can’t hear what you’re saying. Communicating clearly, with equal parts passion, purpose, and clarity, makes you impossible to ignore.”

Liam Scott, Speechwriter and Event Producer

Many youth apply to Remix for the opportunity to write songs, screenplays, books or to become a singer, rapper or musician and perform on stage. Much of art is about communication – thoughts, feelings and stories told through photographs, paintings, poems or songs. All participants begin the semester by developing their own curriculum document. As the semester unfolds, participants meet with their program leaders to talk about their experiences, concerns, achievements and ideal outcomes.

Other examples of practicing oral and written communication skills include a journalist in the creative arts program who interviews artists around the city to write an article; participants in the film program who write their own stories in the hopes of developing a film; participants in the business program who present their business plan to their group; and recording arts participants who get opportunities to perform in front of a live audience. Of the participants we surveyed, 74% agreed that the program had helped them improve their communication skills (writing and speaking).

“Remix helped me communicate because there were a lot of people willing to listen. Graphic design also helps me communicate my life and my experiences through my artwork”

“I learned how to write a novel and was given the quiet space needed in order to accomplish this. I got through 12 chapters in 6 months, pretty much half the novel.”

“I was the shyest person coming into Remix and now I can’t stop talking. I built confidence. I finally have a support system - instead of a problem being shut down it was talked about.”

“Remix taught me how to talk to people in the business.”

“As a participant, anything we need from each other is available. You communicate with others in your group and with the larger group, and you learn how you can help other people through helping yourself. It encourages everyone to build with other people. You learn how to negotiate with other participants to get all the things you need done.”



FINANCIAL

All participants learn about the business side of their art as they develop their projects, and also through workshops on topics including branding and marketing, as well as a series of financial literacy workshops facilitated through a partnership with TD bank. These workshops cover managing credit, financial planning, and budgeting.

Participants in The Art of Business stream work with the program leader one-on-one, constructing a business or marketing plan, and identifying strategies to enter a particular market. Participants have created their own businesses including as publicists, party promoters, event planners, starting their own clothing lines and as managers of artists. The program also brings in guest speakers from creative businesses. Previous guest speakers include: the owner of a PR firm that specializes in music and fashion, the designer for the Olympics campaign, a digital marketing specialist from Warner Music and the co-founders of the Five and Dime Trade Show. A graduate of The Remix Project's Art of Business program was recently named one of Toronto's top 10 fashion start-up brands.

"I accomplished a very huge task that was starting my own clothing line. At first I was given an internship at a popular clothing company and was then hired to work for them."

"I learned all the skills that I needed to run my clothing line. I gained all I needed."

Networking

All of the youth (100%) who were surveyed reported that The Remix Project helped them get resources and/or make connections that will help them find work. Remix helps not only to develop networking skills to talk to potential employers, collaborators and artists, but also to access Remix's network of over 100 local, national and international professionals from successful creative businesses including Universal Music, Timex Group, CTV, E1 Entertainment and radio station Flow 93.5.

"Remix became my primary source to seek out support. I connected with tons of people in the industry and interviewed a number of people. Remix exceeded all my expectations."

"Remix allowed me to take more initiative into networking with others in order to succeed."

"Community, unity and mentorship. I accomplished photoshoots and got networking skills. I got everything I needed. Remix exceeded all expectations."

"I got tons of experience participating in the Remix Project. I was able to get started on my webisodes, my mentor was GREAT and the support system at Remix was incredible. I built networks with so many talented, driven individuals and I'm leaving this with a whole new addition to my life - great people. Everyone was able to help me in so many different ways which got me a step closer to my goals."

"I made friends, learned how to network on a professional level, and made a connection to make my exit strategy work for me. I learned quite a lot from my mentor."



TECHNOLOGY

"We are currently preparing students for jobs that don't yet exist . . . using technologies that haven't yet been invented . . . in order to solve problems we don't even know are problems yet."

Richard Riley, Secretary of Education under Clinton

"It's interdisciplinary combinations--design and technology, mathematics and art--that produce YouTube and Google."

Thomas Friedman
Best-selling Author of The World Is Flat

Despite our technology-driven world, little has changed inside most classrooms. Students whose families can afford technology at home will have advantages over those who struggle financially. Young people who are not in school also need opportunities to learn and apply technology. Participants in The Remix Project learn a variety of computer software programs including Adobe Photoshop, Bridge, Indesign, Finalcut (video editing software), and Protools (for recording music). Many of them learn how to develop their own websites. Although most youth had excellent technology skills coming into the program, 63% agreed that they further improved their computer skills.

"Six months ago I didn't know anybody in the industry and I didn't know how to shoot. I had never touched a camera in my life. I didn't even know what Final Cut was and now I am editing on it. I am leaving Remix with so many great tools that I never had."

"I learned how to use illustrator/graphic design/manage time. It opened new 'artistic horizons'."

"I met a lot of like minded people, got more hands-on experience and learned how to use new programs."



GLOBAL AWARENESS

"This is a story about the big public conversation the nation is not having about education, the one that will ultimately determine not merely whether some fraction of our children get "left behind" but also whether an entire generation of kids will fail to make the grade in the global economy because they can't think their way through abstract problems, work in teams, distinguish good information from bad or speak a language other than English."

C. Willis, Time Magazine

Remix to Rio

In 2007, three Remix Project staff and four participants travelled to Brazil to share knowledge about creating and implementing youth-led arts programs like The Remix Project in the favelas, or ghettos, of the country. The group worked with a local organisation called Soldiers Never More that works to give young people hope and ambition in order to help them avoid a life of crime.

The trip was an inspiration to one of the participants, a graduate of The Remix Project's photography program. She credits the experience as being a catalyst for her growth and one that made her "more curious to see the world, and more passionate about injustices." She started taking Portuguese lessons shortly after the Remix trip. The following year, she returned to Brazil to facilitate photography workshops for the youth. She has since been back twice and is more than ever an advocate for social justice issues; fundraising money in Toronto to give to the youth organization in Brazil.

The other youth had similar thought-provoking experiences. The area was one of the poorest of the poor neighbourhoods and there were "houses made out of cabinets, and whatever they could find". A participant reported that "Seeing that made me change my perspective because I have way more opportunity than they do. I'm not going to let that go to waste".

Other Global Adventures

The Remix Project staff and participants have continued to explore the globe, with five other participants travelling to countries such as South Africa and Colombia, and one participant and one staff member receiving Artist in Residency positions in countries such as Mexico and South Africa. Most recently, through a partnership with the non-profit organization Right to Play, two Remix participants were chosen to travel to Rwanda to participate in a leadership conference on sport for development and peace.



CONCLUSION

The world is constantly changing, however the way young people are educated and trained for the workforce is falling behind. As a society we need to help all students learn and succeed beyond high school. That means making sure that they have the right skills to; develop creative and innovative ways of solving new problems, to effectively communicate and collaborate with others, to be able to create and sustain businesses, to be able to apply technology to do all of these things efficiently and innovatively, and across multiple geographic locations.

The situation is even worse for youth from marginalized communities, where the reality is that there are many social and economic factors that prevent them from completing high school or pursuing post-secondary education. Many of these youth have artistic talents and aspirations of jobs in creative industries, but they lack accessible opportunities to develop the necessary skills. The Remix Project provides that platform for youth to learn essential skills, get work experience and to access jobs in music, television, graphic design, photography, and public relations. For many of these youth, getting caught up in the negative activities in their neighbourhoods is very easy; instead Remix makes it easier for them to pursue their passions and turn them into meaningful employment.

What Does This Mean?

Education and employment are the key to reducing poverty. Typically jobs that don't pay well are those that don't require much experience, and often it is marginalized people who end up filling these low-paid positions, where it is difficult to progress, and the intergenerational cycle of poverty continues. *"The rising demand for a highly skilled workforce also means that there will be a growing income gap between less educated, relatively unskilled workers and highly educated, highly skilled workers. Routine tasks are increasingly being automated, and the routine jobs still done by people barely paid a living wage. Routine work is moving to countries where the cost of labour is very low"*. (Trilling and Fadel, 2009, p. 9).

The Remix Project reduces barriers for youth from marginalized communities to develop skills and gain experience that will increase their chances of finding work. *"Youth unemployment is still recovering from the recession and youth are facing multiple barriers – for example, "potential employers often expect the youth to have previous work experience, even for entry-level positions. So, in many cases, young people can't get a job because they have no work experience. And yet, they can't get work experience, because they aren't being offered any jobs."* (Angel Gurria, Youth Employment – A Call for Change conference, keynote address).

Although intervention programs are unlikely to eradicate social problems, by addressing the factors that contribute to poverty, effective programs can shift the odds in favour of more desirable outcomes. By supporting youth in developing 21st century skills, The Remix Project will not only prepare youth for jobs and increase their chances of finding employment, it will also reduce social exclusion and ultimately create pathways out of poverty.



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