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Promoting Youth Development and Community Involvement with Technology:

The Long Beach YMCA CORAL Youth Institute

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This study was funded by the James Irvine Foundation

Special thanks to Robert Cabeza, Executive Director of the YMCA of Greater Long Beach  
Community Development Branch, Sandra L. Kirkner, Les Peters, Julia Martin, Jesus Salas and

Kana Watanabe

In Press

The Journal of Technology in the Human Services

Abstract

The Long Beach YMCA CORAL Youth Institute is an innovative program that uses technology as a mechanism for promoting positive youth development and technology skills while enhancing school and life success among low-income, culturally-diverse, urban high school students. This article describes the Youth Institute and explores program outcomes on participants from the 2003 Intensive Summer Program ( $N = 37$ ). Results from the quantitative and qualitative research indicated significant positive changes in both technology and leadership skills as well as increased positive youth development and community involvement for participants involved in the program.

*Program Description*

In October, 2001, the James Irvine Foundation funded the Long Beach Communities Organizing Resources to Advance Learning (CORAL) project, a seven-year initiative designed to improve K-12 academic achievement by mobilizing families and aligning community-wide networks of out-of-school resources to support student learning. The project, led by the YMCA of Greater Long Beach, is a collaborative endeavor of parents, non-profit organizations, city agencies, Long Beach Unified School District, and the California State University, Long Beach Department of Social Work. One CORAL program component is the YMCA Youth Institute, an intensive, year-round program that uses technology as an integral mechanism for promoting positive youth development and enhancing the academic success and career readiness of low-income, culturally-diverse high school students. Apple Computers has named the program a National Educational Model Program (“Profiles In Success,” 2004).

The goals of the Youth Institute are to:

1. Provide intensive, year-round enrichment experiences to low-income, culturally-diverse, urban high school students that integrate and emphasize technology.
2. Use youth development principles and project-based learning to promote leadership skills and cultural tolerance and to ensure that participants remain actively involved throughout their high school careers.
3. Teach program participants technology skills in the areas of web design, digital story telling/movie making, animation 2D & 3D, digital graphics, connecting and maintaining computer networks, and presentation and office software.

4. Improve the academic achievement of participants through homework assistance, monitoring school performance, use of technology for assignments, equipment loan, college readiness and preparedness classes and linkage to district content standards.
5. Provide service learning opportunities and paid technology internships so participants can teach others technology and to develop job readiness skills.

### *Program Recruitment*

Youth Institute participants are sought in a number of ways. Applications are given to Long Beach middle and high school counselors and career centers for distribution to students. The non-profit agencies and elementary schools that are partners in the larger CORAL program also receive applications to distribute to youth served by their organizations. The most successful method of recruitment is by current program participants who are asked to recruit new potential participants. Over 200 applications were received for 37 slots available during the summer evaluated here.

Program participation is voluntary and potential participants must submit an application. The application asks applicants to (a) describe self, interests, family and background, (b) identify personal obstacles and challenges they have faced in their life, (c) identify activities, sports and clubs they participate in, (d) provide demographic information, and (e) identify reasons they want to be part of the Youth Institute. They must also submit their most recent report cards, a parent permission letter and sign the Code of Conduct. Income status is collected using participation in the school free lunch program. Participants are selected to represent, to the extent possible, gender and ethnic diversity. Although participants can be entering 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, a higher proportion of students are selected from the younger grades to maximize their

time in the program. Finally, participants are selected based on the quality of their personal statements and life challenges, not on their grades.

### *Description of Program Activities*

#### *Intensive Technology Summer Program*

Incoming students participate in a full-time (35 hours), eight-week summer program. Select alumni from the program are hired to serve as peer teachers. The first week is spent at a wilderness retreat at King's Canyon National Park and focuses on team building, cultural diversity training, decision-making, and life sciences. Participants are assigned to project teams that will be maintained throughout the summer so there is an ethnic and gender mix. Initiative games and a low-ropes course are used to promote group cohesion and leadership skills while improving problem-solving and communication skills. Activities designed to increase cultural awareness and tolerance are integrated into the week. Life sciences are introduced using the outdoor education model. This week is critical to program success because it helps participants to develop the group and problem-solving skills they will need to successfully work in groups to accomplish their summer tasks.

During the remaining weeks, the program uses project-based learning to teach information technology skills. Projects include: (a) digital story telling/ movie making, (b) graphic design, (c) web site creation, (d) presentation and office software, (e) 3D animation, and (f) use of peripheral hardware (scanner, DV cameras, etc). A wide range of the latest software is used including Cinema 4D, Adobe Illustrator, Adobe Photoshop, I-Movie, Final Cut Pro, Power Point, Keynote, Pagemaker, Flash, Extensis InDesign, and Macromedia Dreamweaver.

Participants also learn how to connect, troubleshoot and use computer networks. All classes have

a curriculum description that identifies the pedagogical approach and the skill sets to be learned while linking the program curriculum to school content standards.

Products include animated logos, five to ten minute movies, a magazine focused on teen issues and a website. All projects are designed to help participants gain literacy, math and higher level thinking skills, linked to school content standards and completed in teams. Participants are paid an \$800 stipend for the summer and about 35 new participants are accepted each year.

#### *Year-Round Program*

After graduating from the summer program, youth participate in a year-round program. The components of the year-round program include homework assistance in the CORAL lab, equipment check-out, academic advising, college readiness workshops and personal support, community service with elementary-age children, and paid technology jobs.

#### *Academic Support*

The Youth Institute lab is open 25 hours a week and is staffed to provide homework assistance, Internet research, and access to resources needed to complete school assignments. Participants also use the lab to further develop their technology skills. Participants can borrow equipment such as laptops for home and school use and LCD projectors for school presentations. Project staff provides academic advising, and assist in completing paperwork for college and college readiness workshops. Alumni use the lab to complete homework assignments.

#### *Year-Round Service Learning and Career Development*

All participants are required to spend at least a month providing community service at CORAL elementary schools. High school students take digital cameras and laptops to the schools to teach children technology skills. They teach higher level skills such as movie making, graphic design and Internet research as well as the use of academic software. Participants have

additional service learning opportunities to apply their technology skills. Upon completion of the summer program, they are also eligible for paid technology internships. Examples of these include serving as peer teachers during the summer and year-round program, setting up a computer network and training non-profit staff on computer skills, making promotional videos for local non-profits, and teaching local middle school students technology skills at the request of Apple Computers. These volunteer and paid experiences require participants to work in teams and teach a wide variety of job skills needed in the workforce. The Youth Institute has also placed participants in externships with petroleum companies and a local medical clinic.

### *Leadership Development*

Participants have multiple opportunities to further develop their leadership skills upon completion of the Summer Institute. Seventeen alumni serve as the Youth Commission for the City Councilperson for the 1<sup>st</sup> district. Two alumni were appointed to the Youth Philanthropy Commission which makes funding decisions for youth grants. Five groups of youth have applied for grants for projects. The Youth Institute completed (gathered and analyzed data) the Long Beach Teen Violence Survey. The City Council unanimously voted to incorporate the findings of this study into all funding decisions for youth programs.

### Method

Researchers from the CSULB Department of Social Work oversee the evaluation of the Youth Institute. This article presents initial findings that focused on outcomes and changes gained from participating in the intensive summer program. Self-report survey data was collected from all of the 2003 CORAL Youth Institute Intensive Summer Program participants on their first and last day of the program. Two surveys were completed. The first was the Leadership Skills Inventory (Karnes & Chauvin, 2000), a standardized leadership measure. The inventory

measures nine areas of leadership skill (fundamentals, written communication, speech communication, character-building, decision-making, group dynamics, problem-solving, personal, planning). The instrument has been shown to have strong reliability and validity among youth. The second instrument, the Technology Use and Competencies Inventory assesses pre and post-test use of and skills in the areas of technology hardware, multimedia software, web site design, data collection and report writing, and Internet research. This instrument was self-developed by the researchers based on other instruments and literature review findings on technology competencies for high school students.

Focus groups with the 2003 CORAL Youth Institute Intensive Summer Program participants were also conducted during August 2003 to gain qualitative data from youth participants. The California State University, Long Beach Institutional Review Board approved both research protocols. Both parents and the youth themselves signed informed consent forms to participate in the focus groups.

## Results

### *Self-Report Survey Data*

#### *Sample*

As shown in Table 1, the participants of the 2003 CORAL Youth Institute Intensive Summer Program ranged from 13 to 17 years of age. About half (51%) were 13 or 14 while the rest were between 15 and 17. There were slightly more males (54%) than females (46%). Asian American/Pacific Islanders (35%) and Latinos (30%) were the largest ethnic groups. Almost two-thirds (61%) of the sample were 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> graders.

(insert Table 1 about here)

### *Leadership Skills*

Nine types of leadership skills were measured including fundamentals of leadership (alpha = .90), written communication (alpha = .92), speech communication (alpha = .92), character-building (alpha = .91), decision-making (alpha = .85), group dynamics (alpha = .90), problem-solving (alpha = .91), personal (alpha = .92), and planning (alpha = .94). Participants rated themselves on engaging in each behavior on a scale ranging from 0 “Almost Never” to 3 “Almost Always.” Higher scores indicated better self-perceived skills.

As shown in Table 2, teens who participated in the 2003 CORAL Youth Institute Intensive Summer Program reported significant improvements in all nine areas of leadership. The significant improvements were found in Fundamentals of Leadership,  $t(34) = 7.32, p < .05$ ; Written Communication,  $t(33) = 6.37, p < .05$ ; Speech Communication Skills  $t(34) = 6.74, p < .05$ ; Character-Building Skills  $t(33) = 3.23, p < .05$ ; Group Dynamic Skills  $t(33) = 7.02, p < .05$ ; Decision-Making Skills,  $t(34) = 4.45, p < .05$ ; Problem-Solving Skills,  $t(34) = 5.90, p < .05$ ; Personal Skills,  $t(33) = 6.85, p < .05$ ; and Planning Skills,  $t(34) = 7.21, p < .05$ . Prior to attending the program, these teens rated themselves lowest on speech communication skills and problem-solving skills and highest on character-building and personal skills. The greatest gains were found in problem-solving, fundamentals of leadership and planning skills.

(insert Table 2 about here)

### *Technology Use*

Technology use was measured by participants’ self-report of the frequency of use of 12 types of technology. Participants rated themselves on a scale ranging from 1 “Never” to 4 “Daily.” Higher scores indicated greater frequency of use. Prior to entering the program, participants rated their frequency of use highest on using computers at home and school,

accessing the Internet and using computers to complete schoolwork. Their least frequent use was in the areas of buying on the Internet, graphic design, creating web pages and data processing.

As shown in Table 3, teens who participated in the 2003 CORAL Youth Institute Intensive Summer Program reported significantly more frequent use of e-mail,  $t(34) = 5.59$ ,  $p < .05$ ; creation of web pages,  $t(31) = 4.19$ ,  $p < .05$ ; creation of graphic designs with computer software and code applications,  $t(34) = 7.06$ ,  $p < .05$ ; use of word processing software applications to write text,  $t(34) = 2.53$ ,  $p < .05$ ; use of data processing software applications for databases or spreadsheets,  $t(34) = 5.24$ ,  $p < .05$ ; use of digital video equipment,  $t(34) = 6.02$ ,  $p < .05$ ; participation in Internet chat rooms/ discussion boards,  $t(34) = 3.09$ ,  $p < .05$ ; and use of computers to complete school assignments,  $t(34) = 2.45$ ,  $p < .05$ . The greatest gains in frequency of technology use were found on creating graphic designs, creating web pages, using data processing software and using digital video equipment.

(insert Table 3 about here)

### *Technology Competence*

Technology competence was measured by participants' self-report of knowledge in nine different areas. Participants rated themselves on a scale ranging from 1 "No knowledge" to 4 "Excellent knowledge." Prior to program participation, teens reported their highest levels of knowledge in the area of working collaboratively with others to use technology to compile, synthesize, produce and disseminate information and creative works. Their lowest levels of knowledge were in the areas of using technology to manage and communicate personal and professional information and using technology in the development of strategies for solving problems in the world.

As shown in Table 4, teens who participated in the 2003 CORAL Youth Institute Intensive Summer Program reported significant improvements in their knowledge of:

- (a) input and output devices to successfully operate computers, VCRs, audiotapes and other technologies,  $t(33) = 4.22, p < .05$ ;
- (b) a variety of media and technology resources to create knowledge products for audiences inside and outside the classroom,  $t(33) = 7.08, p < .05$ ;
- (c) working cooperatively and collaboratively with peers, experts, family members, and others to use technology to compile, synthesize, produce and disseminate information and creative works,  $t(32) = 4.18, p < .05$ ;
- (d) the creation of multimedia products with support from teachers, family members or student partners,  $t(33) = 4.87, p < .05$ ;
- (e) the use of technology tools to locate, evaluate, and collect information from a variety of sources,  $t(33) = 5.91, p < .05$ ;
- (f) the use of technology tools to process data and report results,  $t(33) = 6.01, p < .05$ ;
- (g) the use of technology in the development of strategies for solving problems in the world,  $t(32) = 5.78, p < .05$ ;
- (h) the use of technology tools for managing and communicating personal/professional information,  $t(33) = 7.23, p < .05$ ; and,
- (i) the use of a variety of media and formats to communicate information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences,  $t(33) = 6.14, p < .05$ .

The greatest knowledge gains were found on use of media and technology resources to create knowledge products for audiences, use of technology for managing and communicating personal/professional information and use of technology tools to process data and report results.

(insert Table 4 about here)

### *Youth Focus Groups of Current Participants*

The focus groups for current youth participating in the program met for two hours with a trained facilitator to answer a series of questions. The sessions were conducted in English and were audio taped for transcription. Due to the number of participants in the program, three different focus groups were held on different dates to maintain a workable group size. A total of 35 youth participants (95% of total sample) participated in the focus groups. The qualitative data gathered from these focus groups was analyzed using content analysis with *Ethnograph v 5.0* software. Themes were analyzed for patterns of similarities, dissimilarities and frequency.

### *CORAL Recruitment and Reasons for Application*

The CORAL Long Beach Youth Institute recruits 35 new students from five area high schools around Long Beach each year. The focus group participants from the current class indicated a number of ways that they heard about the program. Most students heard about the Institute through a friend who had been involved in the Institute. However, the school was also a primary recruitment tool with counselors, teachers and other school personnel providing applications to the Institute. Other respondents indicated that they learned about the Institute from a flyer or an ad in the school newspaper. Other recruitment sources included alumni, program staff and family members.

Most of the focus group participants stated that the reasons for applying to the Institute were primarily the money and the opportunity to learn about computers, software and gain technology skills for the future. However, others reasons such as the opportunity to develop new friendships, learn about other cultures, and do something challenging such as teaching others and

going on trips were also mentioned because of the experiences their friends who told them about the program reported.

I became aware of the program with one of my friends that got involved in it, and she was very excited and she got accepted. It totally changed her. I saw confidence in her that she didn't have and a way she spoke. She, her whole way of holding herself changed. So I am like I get money, I learn technology skills, and I gain what she gained. So I might as well give it a try.

At first, I wanted to be in it for the money. I thought it would be easy, but then when I got in, I started changing. I started speaking to a Youth Institute director about my problems and then I gave him all of my trust. I talked to them about things that I don't really talk to my parents about and I trust them. It's kind of like fellow friendships with the goal beyond CORAL. The flyer they sent out said most about the technology, but once we got in, we started developing friendships, trusts, and bonds.

I also got into it because we were going to be helping elementary school kids, I really got excited about that because I have a little sister and she wants to learn everything I do. So it's teaching other people outside of your family, things that you know. It's like passing it on.

When I heard about learning about dealing with different ethnicities, different things, and learning other cultures and hanging out with different ethnicities, that kind of drew me in more because that's what I wanted to do.

### *Participation and Opinions on Program Activities*

A number of program activities take place during the Youth Institute including a retreat, technology skill development through project-based learning, field trips and service projects. Most responses to program activities made by focus group participants were positive.

Participants in the Institute go on a wilderness retreat before the summer program begins. Most of the focus group participants reported that they liked this program activity. It was the most frequently mentioned activity and generated lots of discussion of what they liked and

disliked. While what they like varied, the most frequent dislike was related to the long hikes in the woods.

The very first trip was the most amazing trip we all could have. We were in the middle of nowhere and we got experiences normally we wouldn't experience. I think that's what set up the whole experience for the whole program.

The trip gave us a bond that grew over time as the institute progressed and I think that's what mainly helped us accomplish our challenges, and trust we were going to trust.

### *Technology Program Activities*

The summer institute began in June and ended with graduation in early August (a total of eight weeks) with the focus on 'Creative Digital Arts'. Students were exposed to a wide variety of software programs and computer skills. Students were placed in project teams and carry out multiple assigned tasks towards the creation of a short film and a Teen Magazine. Most of the technology program activities were mentioned by focus group participants as something they enjoyed. They were excited by the opportunity to learn new technology skills particularly in the area of making a movie and web design. They also enjoyed the opportunity to learn about graphic design and animation. However, many reported that they disliked the process of putting their technology skills to use particularly when dealing with editing, deadlines and having to work as a team. Despite their dislike for working in a group, many found that the technology projects created opportunities to get to know each other better. They said things like "I liked doing the graphic design and animation," "I liked doing the editing and the web design. I liked the movies, the whole process of doing the movie editing and all the graphic design that comes with doing a movie," "Being in everybody's movie you got to know each other and bond as a family and," "Editing was just bad because it took forever and if you are not a patient person, then it will just keep driving you crazy but everything else was great."

Other program activities that the focus group participants mentioned as ones they enjoyed included field research trips to The Museum of Tolerance, The Aquarium of the Pacific where students do tide pool surveys, the Long Beach Nature Center and a video appreciation workshop with The Long Beach Museum of Art.

*Opinions of Overall Learning in Program*

Focus group participants were asked about what aspects of the program taught them the most and least as well as what contributed the most to their learning and development. Most participants believed that all aspects of the program taught them something and could not think of any aspects that taught them the least. Some did mention learning certain software programs such as Cinema 4D and i- Design as being difficult while others found the movie making the most useful activity.

All parts taught me something. Every day we learned something new. Every single day we learned to trust each other more. We went through hard times together.

We learned everyday. Being a part of the Youth Institute made me think that even though we are all different colors, we are still human beings. We treat everyone the same and you were forced to be with people you didn't like and you just had to get along with that person. We are told this is not school so everyone here cares for each other and if you are hurt, they help you. If you have a question, they say to ask and we'll answer it. If someone is hurt mentally, everyone will go and comfort that person. Being here taught me to be a better person and treat everyone better and also taught me leadership skills.

Before we made the mini movie, we used the little camera and they gave us props to use and we just got it and made it. That kind of helped us.

The wilderness retreat was also mentioned several times as the program activity that contributed the most to focus group participants' learning and development.

The thing that did it for me was the wilderness retreat. It made me really reflect on everything and it helped me figure out things that I hadn't cleared up before. It opened me up to accept more, to learn more and move forward.

When we all came to that first meeting, we were all distant from each other. We didn't know anyone and were afraid to say hi. I knew one person and we were with each other and did not want to talk to anybody else because we were afraid. Then on that one retreat we had bonded more because we were put into groups with people that we did not know. We had to bond in order to finish certain tasks or cook dinner or breakfast, and we just had to work together and that is what brought us closer.

Program activities were not the only things discussed as contributing to focus group participants' learning and development. Many positive comments about the staff, other Institute members, alumni, the environment and ability to work independently were often mentioned.

What contributed the most was the bond that we all had. We could really ask for help when we needed it. We knew that we were not going to be made fun of in front of everybody. We all understand that we have different levels of understanding things so I think that is what contributed the most to learning.

Everyone had a positive impact on each other. There was never anything negative. Also the environment, it is a safe environment not like at school that is not safe sometimes. Here in the Institute, they, the staff, treated us as like an adult, and we were used to being treated like a child. If you had questions, they answered it. If you had to use the bathroom in the class, you did not have to raise your hand because they trusted you. We had to learn that if you go to the bathroom and don't really have to use it, you are missing out. So, if you go to college and you do the same thing, your grades will go down.

I would like to say that it was the trust that our teachers gave us that made us feel just like friends and not teachers. Most teachers are supposed to be called by their last name, but our instructors

said to call them by their first names. That made me feel much better, knowing that I could just talk to instructors and I learned faster in this class.

If you are kidding around with teachers in school, they will probably send you to a principal's office, but here you are treated as friends so we can joke around. But they just teach you there is a time to play and a time to be serious.

Alumni really helped a lot because when we needed their help they would always help you.

Alumni were there to help if somebody couldn't explain it well enough. The alumni could explain it because they learned it too.

### *Access to Computers*

With the Institute's focus on technology, participants were asked about the kind of computer access they had prior to starting the Institute and how they used computers. Most of the focus group participants indicated that they had a computer at home and used it primarily for homework, school projects and Internet chat rooms. Other uses of the computer were browsing the Internet, word processing, graphic design, games, e-mail, and downloading music. Some participants stated they did not use the computer for anything while other participants stated that they used it for everything. They also indicated that they had computers at school but they were not always able to use them. Those who did not have access at home stated that they would use a friend's or family member's computer when needed.

### *Knowledge, Skills and Application of Technology*

Focus group participants were asked about both about what knowledge and skills they gained from participating in the Youth Institute program activities and specifically about the technology skills they developed. Participants mentioned an increased knowledge and skill in a number of technology and digital media when asked specifically about technology such as:

(a) knowledge of different computer operating systems, (b) use of software such as Cinema 3D, Excel 1, GO 1, Final Cut Pro, Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator, and (c) development of skills such as web and graphic design, how to make and edit a movie, use a camera and camcorder, type faster, put together a presentation, take better pictures, and storyboarding.

Many participants mentioned the technology skills when asked about overall general knowledge and skills but the majority of participants talked about other things they learned about themselves and life skills that went beyond just the technology skills and knowledge. These included: leadership, making friends, getting along with others, speaking in front of others and voicing their opinions, balance in life and motivation to continue with their career goals.

A lot of technology and life skills, learning to get along with other people, meeting other people, accepting other races and diversity.

Technology definitely! I was kind of bad in that department and also personal strength. There are things that the Institute helped me realize things that I didn't know I had. They helped me develop them and accept them as a part of me.

When I first got into the institute, I tried to act so hard. But I just learned to open up more and learned to be a goof ball. I learned more people skills and technology wise too.

I found I have a comfortable spot where I can speak in front of people that I didn't have before.

I think that I achieved more balance in life.

Not being afraid to voice your opinions or give your idea.

I learned everything from technology skills, web pages, animation, and making friends to trust and to forgive, ask for help, to get help, to control my temper.

I learned a lot of things about myself. I learned a lot of technology too, like web design and editing.

I learned a lot about technology, how to make friends and how to become more laid back.

I didn't know anything about a computer. But now, I know more about it, way more.

Focus group participants were asked how they thought the knowledge and skills they gained from the Institute had helped them now and for the future. Many participants shared immediate benefits at school and with homework. Others mentioned learning about new options for careers and college. Beyond the knowledge and skills mentioned, many discussed help with human relations.

It is going to help make my grades and projects look better.

It helped my homework.

It kind of gave me an idea of what I want to do after college or during college.

Before I came to CORAL, I didn't know what I wanted to do. I was kind of interested in business.

But I heard that sometimes it is not successful. I learned about options like web design, editing, filming and stuff.

Along with doing better at school, I think it is going to help us with our job, because as we grow, the future is going to get more technical and it is good to know about computers, the web and researching and all of that.

I gained more of a human relation skill type. The program taught me that I should respect people for who they are. I can't change them but I can tolerate them. And so that will help me in the future because that prevents more tension between me and other people.

I think that since we have gone through a lot together it has helped us work in an equal environment so maybe we can use what we learned later in life to make things easier for us.

Focus group participants were also asked how they have been able to share and use their knowledge and skills with others outside the Youth Institute. The majority of the participants talked about doing community service that involved teaching Girl Scouts, younger children and friends the technology skills they acquired. They also talked about sharing their knowledge with

their family and teachers at school as they are allowed to check out laptops and other technology equipment to take home and to school for projects and presentations.

I got to do CORAL by the Beach and we got to show the kids how to use the Internet and how to use Illustrator, and I also got to help fellow classmates with HTML.

I have showed my parents about web making and they are pretty amazed.

I used it with friends. I kind of taught them a little of what I know. I am creating my own web site. I think in the future I will use them because they said we can check out LCD projectors, cameras, and a laptop. I think that it is very good and I think it will help me directly to get better grades on presentations. Other students don't have access to that and it is really sad because not everyone has access to that.

After we graduate from this institute, we are able to check out a power book or a camera for whatever. We just have to turn it back within 3 days. So in those 3 days, we check it out and we can take it home and share with our family.

### *Program Benefits*

The Youth Institute evaluation was primarily focused on the changes and benefits gained by participants in the Institute. Program participants were asked about their perceptions of the changes in themselves and others, school performance, relationships with peers and family, leadership, cultural understanding and community.

#### *Changes in Self and Others*

Focus group participants were very open about the personal changes they noted after participating in the program. Many discussed how they used to treat people as well as unpleasant personality characteristics such as meanness and selfishness. Others discussed how perceptions of others had changed and were candid about the changes they noted about others in the group and group dynamics.

I changed myself because I used to be mean to people, but not anymore. I am mean to people sometimes but not all the time.

I have kind of changed the way I profile people by the way they acted because the way they act doesn't mean that's the way they really are.

I became less selfish and actually think about my family now. Also I see changes in other people.

I don't know for some reason they seem competitive and just bring their ugly side out and it taught me how to watch out for those kinds of people.

I found out that I became a stronger person because before I came to CORAL, I had some personal problems and I wasn't going to join CORAL. However, a change of plans happened, and this has taught me to be stronger. I became more patient and I found out a lot of stuff about life. Before I came here, I used to hang out with friends and we used to talk. We used to be immature but now I came here and it taught me a lot of stuff. So now I go out with my friends but I don't act the same. So they look at me like I am different. I am but I am not.

I am more thoughtful and more concerned about my future.

Since we started, some of us are better people in a group. In the beginning, when I saw them, I made my own conclusions about how they were going to be. But I've learned that people can change even though they acted that way at first because of nervousness. I saw different things about people than I saw at the first day. And I learned first they look more outgoing because I had a lack of trust in people and I gained more trust in people and am becoming a better person.

I enjoy working with like a large group of people more. I smile and laugh a lot more.

### *School Performance*

At the time of the focus group, participants had not started back to school. However, they were asked about any changes they noted about their attitudes about school. Most talked about school and noted a positive change in attitudes regarding involvement and their performance in school.

I would like to add that when I go back to school I won't be lazy because I have been doing work all summer and it will just be a continuation of the summer.

I didn't really take school seriously. I didn't even want to go to college. But now I look at it from a different perspective and my dream is to get into USC. So I really want to finish everything.

Graduate with honors and everything, so I look at school more as a goal than something you have to do everyday.

I look forward to challenging the school now, not being challenged by it.

I actually want to get into the student council so I can have a voice in what happens at my school.

I am actually going to run next fall. I also want to run in student commissions.

During my last year in school I went downhill and didn't really care. Now I actually want to do good now. I want to open myself up more with people at school because I don't really have friends at school.

I am more aware now. I guess I will be more aware of what is going to happen, what is going on and if we have a project we can always come to CORAL.

Focus group participants also discussed how their attitudes had changed about the future as many indicated a desire to go to college or more focused career goals. Participants said things such as "I want to go to college and CORAL is helping me out," "I want to graduate with honors," "I wanted to be a dancer but now I want to teach disabled kids," and "It taught me more about what I want to study in college."

#### *Relationships with Peers and Family*

Focus group participants spent the most time talking about the changes they had seen in their relationships with family, particularly their parents. Most expressed that their parents gained more trust and understanding of them and that they appreciated their parents more. They also discussed more positive relationships with peers and the ability to understand peers' perspectives better and the value of certain friendships.

The Youth Institute proved to my family that I am more responsible and I get to do things that I want to do more.

Before the Youth Institute, my mom used to tell me something and she had to tell me 5 times and I would lie down and watch TV. But now I do it right after she tells me. She even noticed there is a big change. Before the Institute, my mom never used to let me go anywhere, like to friends' house, because I guess she thought I was going to do something bad. Now she lets me go to my friends because the Youth Institute changed me.

It helped me appreciate what my mother does for me because she is a single mom and I really, really appreciate it. And understand really what she does and try to help her out more.

After being in here, I finally knew how people around me are because I found some stuff out and it really showed people's character. Also in family life, at first they didn't really understand, but once you get through it all and they see what you have done, they really support you after that. I think once I showed my parents what I did with I-Movie and all of the graphic designs they respected me more. We weren't really close, but I think now that I am growing, they see a little change in me. They see that I am being my own man, being me and doing what I am doing. I think they finally respect that now, but my brothers they don't really care.

Before I use to have a lot of punk friends. Through CORAL, I learned self perspective and to receive points of view from other people a lot more closely. So it taught me to look at people in a whole new way. Thus I was able to see where they are coming from at times. It helped me get along with them better. Also it helped us be in on a level where we both understood each other and none was inferior to the other.

When I hung out with these new people this whole summer, I thought about when I was hanging out with my friends at school, I would choose these new people over those people I hung out with before. I guess who I used to hang out with wasn't really as good as I thought they were and I think I was just being taken advantage of by them. Now when they talk to me, I just don't want to talk to them anymore because I know how they really are now after being in this program.

### *Leadership*

Focus group participants shared a great deal about the lessons on leadership they gained from the Institute. Most of the focus group participants would build on something another person said and they were very positive and willing to share what they learned. They also discussed what changes they had seen in themselves regarding leadership and how it may influence their plans for the future. Most reported that they would like to take more of a leadership role in school or in their future careers.

You learn about leadership. Anybody can be a leader, but it takes a real person, a real team worker to lead a group. To lead them through hard and tough times and be with them and not make them feel inferior to you. Make them feel like they have the same capabilities that you do so they can do the best they can instead staying with stress like oh my god I am not going to, he is going to get mad at me, or something. I think that it's better to like tell them, or make them know that they have the same capabilities that you do.

I learned that there are different types of leadership and each situation calls for a different type and that leadership doesn't mean that you have to make yourself above everybody else and close yourself off. It means that you are more open and are willing to accept others more.

The real point of being a leader is to compromise and accept everybody who brings better points and gather everybody to help and compromise and come to an agreement.

I actually want to be a leader now. I think that my leadership abilities have grown stronger.

Everything that we do requires leadership.

### *Cultural Understanding*

Focus group participants were asked about what they learned about other cultures and how that knowledge had influenced them in terms of personal development and future plans. Most discussed how much they had learned to respect other cultures and take pride in their own

culture. They also discussed how they learned from each other by being involved one another's cultural traditions.

I have learned to respect all the cultures. They all have their own traditions and we have learned that to be part of a culture and proud of what it is.

I learned that all cultures, no matter how different they are, their basic fundamentals always involves family, friends and friendships.

I also learned and understood that everybody is not the same. Everybody has their own way of being. They have their own character and sometimes you should follow along but sometimes you should know when to stop. Every single culture is not the same-they always have some kind of differences but also have their similarities.

I learned a lot about the different ethnic backgrounds. Instead of just being Asians, there are Cambodians and people that come from China. There is not just Asian, there is Cambodian and all kinds of different cultures.

I respect every culture even more now that I learned about them. I didn't even know what a "quinceñera" was until they told me. It's probably the number one reason why I joined CORAL-all the ethnicities and diversity in here.

I want to travel the world now.

It makes me want to like go to college and study abroad in Italy or in South America. I would like to help the community down there.

### *Community*

Most focus group participants had discussed their community involvement in previous questions. They were also asked what they thought they gained from these experiences. All of the participants reported positive changes including knowledge about working with the government and working with children as well as wanting to be more involved to make changes in their community.

I gained more knowledge about working with children since I want to be a teacher.

I gained more patience working with little kids and with different kids at each level.

I learned about what gives teens a voice. One day we went over to see a city council member, and she just sat down with us. We told her about all the problems around Long Beach that we have seen from our eyes. Because this is where we live and where we go to school, we are trying to make the city a better place for us. It gives us a voice in helping out the community, instead of the adults.

I got involved in the youth commission. I was able to be expressive and talk about the problems that exist in the community that you see needing to be changed. That's really good and there should more people in it. Everybody should be able to express themselves it should be like a community kind of thing.

### *Summary of Focus Group Data*

The focus groups ended with the question: Would you encourage a friend to participate in the Youth Institute and if so, what benefits would you tell them they would gain from participating in the CORAL Youth Institute. Their comments summarize the positive experiences mentioned in the focus groups.

The skills you might gain are technology and friendship skills.

You would grow in friendships and how to be a leader, step up and it will probably change your whole life.

It gives them strength of character and self-discovery as well as skills for the future.

You can use the latest technology like one of the faster computers and you get to learn cool things that you only learn in college. Stuff you have to pay for to learn and here it's all free and they pay you to take this.

You gain a lot of advice and insight into life and you become more humanitarian.

They would gain life experience because this whole summer is like 20 years of life experience in

one little package that you can just experience and be more prepared.

The bigger the program gets, the more youth can get help over the year. The money and check is not really an issue. That was the one thing to bring us all together. The more the program expands, the more the merits are. The youth in Long Beach, especially the city of Long Beach, grow and become more powerful. We become more educated as a community so future generations will have a better chance to survive in the city because we have more educated youth. And at least more hope living in the ghetto.

### Conclusions

Overall, the findings presented here provide support for the premise that technology, combined with positive youth development, can help high school youth develop a wide range of skills. Participants in the 2003 CORAL Youth Institute Intensive Summer Program self-reported significant improvements in all leadership skills, frequency of technology use, and their technology knowledge. Although the absence of a control group makes it difficult to link these changes specifically to program participation, the results are highly encouraging and in line with the stated goals and objectives of the program. It is also particularly unlikely that the participants would have gained the high-level technology skills investigated here without a specific educational intervention.

In terms of leadership development, participants reported self-significant improvement in nine different areas. These findings suggest that the wilderness retreat, project-based learning and other program components helped participants improve in all aspects of leadership while still focusing on technology. Thus, when designed appropriately, technology programs would appear to have the ability to do more than simply influence technology outcomes.

Participants reported significantly more frequent use on eight (61%) out of 12 technology items. However, all of the significant gains were in areas that were specifically targeted by the

summer program. For example, the program was not designed to increase frequency of playing computer games or shopping on the Internet. Although most of the participants who entered the program had used the technologies rated here to some degree, program participation appears to have increased their usage in multiple areas. It is likely that the increase in usage can be attributed both to increased access and increased ability. Participants also reported significant knowledge gains on all of the technology competencies. These findings provide additional support for the idea that knowledge and skills were enhanced as well as simply usage. The breadth of the material covered by the summer program is clearly evident given the broad range of knowledge gains reported here.

Focus group participants were positive about all aspects of the program and noted a number of changes in the areas discussed above. It is clear that they perceived the program impacted their relationships with family and friends, changed their attitudes about leadership, cultural understanding and community service and contributed to their personal development in a number of ways. Both the survey data and focus groups indicated that they gained in their technology and leadership skills. Most interesting to note from the focus groups is that most of the participants were attracted to the Institute for the money and technology skills but gained much more in terms of their personal development, life and relationship building skills. The technology component appears to promote youth development and community involvement.

Taken together these findings are quite encouraging and suggest the program is achieving some of its stated goals. It is also exciting that the technology component seems to be a strong initial attraction for youth participating in the program but the data indicates that participants gained more from the staff and other participants in the program. This youth development perspective suggests that teens are more likely to participate in out-of-school activities if they are

bonded to program staff and other participants. This is a key element to program success because research suggests that teens are less likely than younger children to stay involved in programs.

The initial program evaluation findings indicate the Youth Institute experience is positive for participants and that many changes and benefits occur as a result of their involvement. However, it is worth noting, that the summer program is only a small part of the entire Youth Institute experience. It will be interesting to follow these participants and their changes as they progress through the entire program.

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Table 1  
 Sample Description of Year 3 Youth Institute Participants

(*N* = 37)

	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>
◆ Age at Start of Program		
13	18.9%	7
14	32.4%	12
15	27.0%	10
16	16.2%	6
17	5.4%	2
◆ Gender		
Male	54.1%	20
Female	45.9%	17
◆ Ethnicity		
Asian American/Pacific Islander	35.1%	13
Latino	29.7%	11
African-American	13.5%	5
European-American	13.5%	5
Mixed Ethnicities	8.1%	3
◆ Grade		
8 <sup>th</sup>	29.7%	11
9 <sup>th</sup>	32.4%	12
10 <sup>th</sup>	21.6%	8
11 <sup>th</sup>	16.2%	6

Table 2  
Participant Report of Changes in Leadership Skills  
(N = 37)

<u>Skills</u>	<u>Pre Summer</u>			<u>Post Summer</u>		<u>Differenc e</u>
	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	
Fundamentals of Leadership	2.07	.62	35	2.63	.32	.56*
Written Communication	2.02	.65	34	2.49	.45	.47*
Speech Communication	1.93	.61	35	2.41	.48	.48*
Character Building	2.46	.42	34	2.67	.41	.21*
Group Dynamics	2.16	.45	34	2.56	.37	.39*
Decision-Making	2.25	.45	35	2.61	.42	.35*
Problem-Solving	1.96	.67	35	2.56	.40	.60*
Personal	2.33	.45	34	2.71	.27	.39*
Planning	2.05	.58	35	2.57	.38	.53*

\*p<.05

Table 3  
Participant Report of Changes in Technology Use  
(N = 37)

	<u>Pre Summer</u>			<u>Post Summer</u>		<u>Difference</u>
	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	
Use the computer at home/school	3.40	.85	35	3.37	.84	.03
Send e-mail	2.46	1.12	35	3.40	.70	.94*
Access the Internet	3.44	.82	34	3.60	.70	.15
Create web pages	1.53	.92	32	2.59	1.04	1.06*
Create graphic designs with computer software applications	1.46	.92	35	2.97	1.01	1.51*
Use word processing software applications to write text	3.00	.59	35	3.34	.84	.34*
Use data processing software for databases or spreadsheets	1.74	.82	35	2.71	1.01	.97*
Use digital video equipment	1.91	.85	35	2.89	.87	.97*
Participate in Internet chat rooms/listservs	2.06	1.14	35	2.80	1.11	.74*
Play computer games	2.66	.87	35	2.71	1.10	.06
Buy things on the Internet	1.45	.94	33	1.52	.91	.06
Use the computer to complete school assignments	3.11	.80	35	3.43	.78	.31*

\* $p \leq .05$

Table 4  
 Participant Report of Changes in Technology Competencies  
 (N =37)

	<u>Pre-Summer</u>		<u>N</u>	<u>Post-Summer</u>		<u>Difference</u>
	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>		<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	
Use input and output devices to successfully operate computers, VCR's, audiotapes, etc.	2.88	.84	34	3.50	.75	.62*
Use a variety of media and technology resources to create knowledge products for audiences	2.29	.91	34	3.53	.62	1.24*
Work collaboratively with others to use technology to compile, synthesize, produce, and disseminate information	3.03	.77	33	3.61	.61	.58*
Create multimedia products with support from teachers, family members, or student partners.	2.59	.96	34	3.53	.62	.94*
Use technology tools to locate, evaluate, and collect information from a variety of sources.	2.71	.84	34	3.62	.65	.91*
Use technology tools to process data and report results.	2.38	.82	34	3.41	.61	1.03*
Use technology in the development of strategies for solving problems in the world.	2.18	.88	33	3.12	.74	.94*
Use technology tools for managing and communicating personal/professional information.	2.09	.90	34	3.24	.78	1.15*
Use a variety of media and formats to communicate information and ideas effectively.	2.24	.92	34	3.15	.86	.91*

\*p< .05