

# Chasing Disney

## Tween Filmmakers Get Their Shot at Creativity

CARRI FRY AND ALYSSA LARUE

Disney knows a thing or two about making movies. So when Derby (KS) Public Library received the Disney sponsored Curiosity Creates grant, we chose to bring the Hollywood filmmaking experience to life with the Tween Moviecraft Creating Creators project. The project brought together thirty tweens ranging in age from 8 to 14, with a median age range of 9 to 10.

Tweens were afforded a comprehensive filmmaking opportunity to form their own fully functioning film production crew where they had the chance to write, produce, direct, edit, and premiere their own original short film.

We applied for the grant with the goal of developing programs to stop the “Fourth Grade Slump” as identified by the Center for Childhood Creativity.<sup>1</sup> We were especially intrigued with the creative aspect Disney brought to this collaboration considering our expression of curiosity through film and storytelling. We were interested in sharing our program to gain sponsorship and support for more film equipment and to showcase this program’s unique impact on our young patrons and their families. Our program facilitator, who has a BA in Film and an MA in Social Work, helped design the Tween Moviecraft program.

The program was adapted from the Teen Moviecraft program we had successfully designed and implemented the previous two summers. Because the original teen program was designed for ages 12 to 18, we incorporated the position of volunteer. We recruited teens who had previous experience in the program and an adult professional filmmaker who also serves as a Wichita Tallgrass Film Festival Programmer as team coaches, specifically in screenwriting, acting, and camera unit roles.

The design for Tween Moviecraft focused on the seven critical components of creativity outlined by the Center for Childhood Creativity: Imagination and Originality, Flexibility, Decision

Making, Communicating and Self-Expression, Collaboration, Motivation, and Action and Movement.<sup>2</sup>

### Imagination and Originality

Tween Moviecraft offered hands-on experience using the latest camera and screenwriting technologies to promote both technical and social skills. Tweens took on film production roles mirroring those in Hollywood, such as director, special-effects supervisor, actor, make-up artist, and camera technician, all collaborating to create their own universe through the art of visual storytelling.

### Flexibility

The Tween Moviecraft program emphasized interpersonal relationships as well as emotional intelligence by enhancing critical thinking, group cohesion, and identifying perceptions.

In conjunction with expanding perspectives in media representation, Tween Moviecraft also taught tweens how to expand their perspectives of one another through encouraging communication and emotional regulation skills. While producing their film, tweens solved problems, compromised on ideas, and implemented skills that required adaptability to change.



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The program itself is highly adaptable to meet the needs of the specific participants based on their abilities. We emphasized participants' strengths instead of limitations. By encouraging tweens to not only see others differently, but also to see themselves differently and as more competent—especially in intense environments—they developed better awareness and confidence in themselves and heightened emotional sensitivity and empathy to those around them.

## Decision Making

Tweens were not only creating for themselves but also for their production team, a unified interconnected machine of artists that they branded Pancake Productions. Participants experienced the interconnectedness of all members of the team in correlation to the overall outcome of the production. They came to realize that the actors need the make-up artist just as the director needs the lighting technician and that if one member does not work effectively in their role, the entire team suffers.

## Communicating and Self-Expression

Paula Holmes, ALSC Curiosity Creates grant consultant, noted the following in her Best Practices Report, "The components

that stood out during my observation were collaboration, communication, and self-expression. The small group crews, all highly motivated based on their interest working towards the same goal, shared both high levels of collaborative thinking and communication."<sup>3</sup>

Participants are taught to share their visceral response to the art of film with one another in a nonjudgmental atmosphere and to bounce ideas back and forth in brainstorming sessions.

## Collaboration

Collaboration is the central element of the Tween Moviecraft program because of its use of communal creativity. Our participants varied greatly, but together they shared their ideas and focused on creating a short film. Collaboration encourages effective decision making because it promotes a sense of accountability and responsibility among the group members.

## Motivation

Youth rose to the challenge, establishing a production team and creating a short film in twelve two-hour sessions. Creating an original film in twenty-four hours is a daunting task for young people. However, they were motivated by their desires to create, collaborate, and showcase a product that would make them

proud. Participants were internally motivated to work based on their understanding of accountability to their production team. When members missed sessions or made mistakes, they immediately saw the domino effect it created for the team.

## Action and Movement

Physicality was essential to the Tween Moviecraft program structure as participants applied knowledge and brought their creative ideas to life. The program was designed to be entirely non-static, adopting the theory that learning is best achieved interactively, in the field, and through experiential practice.

## Planning and Implementation

Tween Moviecraft included master classes and labs. In the first, members were trained to watch, write, and produce movies. During these workshops, games allowed members to actively interact with one another.

Lab sessions were submersion into the filmmaking process. Members moved

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about the library, scouting locations, rearranging furniture, rehearsing, choreographing stunts, and learning the technical skills required to operate the film equipment. On film days, members moved from scene to scene, carrying equipment, engaging in special effects design, performing, and ultimately creating the film.

## Outcome/Feedback

We were aware of the interest in hosting a tween program, but the response we received was staggering. The program required online registration, and within an hour of the link opening, the program enrollment was at capacity. When registration closed, our waitlist was twice that of enrollment. This demonstrated the great demand for this type of program within our community.

The program has brought our community closer by bringing together youth who had not known one another prior to this program and asking them to create something that is uniquely

theirs. The pride that families, schools, and the City of Derby take in their accomplishment is immeasurable and the program has ignited a spark within the youth who participated to continue to create.

*The Tween Moviecraft movie is posted on our YouTube channel at [www.youtube.com/user/DerbyPublicLibrary](http://www.youtube.com/user/DerbyPublicLibrary).*

## References

1. "Inspiring a Generation to Create: Critical Components of Creativity in Children," Center for Childhood Creativity at the Bay Area Discovery Museum, March 20, 2015, <http://centerforchildhoodcreativity.org/>.
2. Ibid.
3. Paula Holmes, "Curiosity Creates Innovative Library Programming for Children" (Chicago: Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association, 2016).

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