Convergence
IN ACTION
2013-2014
Convergence Academies
Connect • Consume • Create
Columbia College Chicago
Center for Community Arts Partnerships
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Photo by Tilden Freshman, Brenda Alcarez
Empowering Schools, Teachers, and Students

Early in 2013, the Center for Community Arts Partnerships (CCAP) at Columbia College Chicago was awarded a prestigious grant from the Department of Education's Investing in Innovation initiative to launch the Convergence Academies at Morrill Math and Science School and Tilden Career Community Academy.

Coming to the close of our first academic year, we are pretty darn proud of all that has been accomplished. This booklet—Convergence In Action—provides a glimpse at how we are working to advance student learning by building the capacity of teachers to design deep and meaningful 21st century learning experiences for all students.

Resourcing and Retooling Tilden and Morrill through:

- High quality professional training for teachers in best practices around teaching and learning, technology and digital media integration, curriculum design, and Common Core State Standards alignment.
- Technology tools, computers, iPads, and state-of-the-art software to support classroom projects using digital media.
- Additional partnerships and donations from other corporations and non-profit organizations providing software, textbooks, architectural design, furniture, and capital improvements.
- Digital Media Mentors, who as professional teaching artists and faculty at Columbia College, work side by side as coaches with teachers.
- The creation of a Digital Atelier that serves as a multimedia lab and innovation incubator.
"The most important change at my school since we became a Convergence Academy is a focus on creativity. My students are receiving the resources and training to unleash their creativity and understand its role in their lives and futures."

—Rahul Gupta, English Teacher, Tilden
What a grand year for Convergence Academies. Oh, the places we’ve gone! Convergence has had many important players embedded within both Morrill Elementary and Tilden High School this 2014 school year. Our Digital Learning Strategist (DLS) focused our interventions to help turn teachers into designers. She created supports that empowered teachers to shape learning to reflect their interests. The Digital Atelieristas (DA) helped teachers think about how learning could look different in the classroom. They were able to model and document the process of learning and make it more visible for all to see. The Media Integration Specialists (MIS) helped teachers design thoughtful learning experiences that brought real world contexts into the classrooms. Their professional development efforts brought innovative practices to teachers to implement into their daily instruction. Digital Media Mentors (DMM) coached teachers on how to provide avenues for students to express themselves creatively and support them along the way. They were integral in creating a safe place where teachers could take risks and become learners themselves. Our Coordinator of Digital Pedagogy and Mentorship helped guide our Digital Media Mentors in how to effectively coach teachers with scaffolded levels of support.

All of these team members have played an integral part in the progress we have made with the implementation of our model. We are thankful for being able to collaborate with the leaders and faculty at both Morrill and Tilden. Principals, Michael Beyer and Maurice Swinney, along with their staffs, provide us with inspiration to push our practices. Convergence Academies is aware of the many mountains that lie ahead, but we are ready to get on our way and visit all the great places we will go!

— Mindy Faber & Don LaBonte, Co-Directors, Convergence Academies
The Convergence Model

The Convergence Academies Professional Learning Model prepares teachers to become designers of powerful learning experiences. Teachers learn to think like a designer through the development of Convergence Units in collaboration with professional digital media artists, or Digital Media Mentors, and Media Integration Specialists. Convergence Units empower students through the “3C’s” model:

**Connect** – Students are able to connect their learning to the real world. Interacting with diverse individuals and communities, students thoughtfully critique and discuss others’ work and ideas, and collaborate with others online and in-person.

**Consume** – Students conduct research to locate text and visual resources, evaluate the quality of information, analyze the reliability of information sources, and critically interpret text and visual media.

**Create** – Students learn specific pre-production, production and post-production skills in various digital media, including photography, film/video, audio, graphic design, web design, game/interactive design, robotics and journalism. They should be able to write, annotate and edit content, both text and visual, in order to create pieces that synthesize, advocate, provoke, express, and report.
Convergence at MORRILL
There is something special going on at Morrill Elementary. On the very first day, Convergence was welcomed by bright and engaged students, a dedicated and energetic faculty, caring and supportive parents, and a principal with vision and grit, dedicated to helping the school grow. This was a school that was ready to take teaching and learning to the next level, but they needed a partner that shared their vision. Morrill has fully integrated Convergence across all aspects of the school: from classroom instruction to teacher training to marketing and recruitment of new families. Classroom projects engage students as community activists, artists, journalists, and critics, in addition to readers and writers. Students are learning how to work together and use new technology in their lives, both in and out of school. Morrill is making major strides, and Convergence is honored to be a partner in that growth.

*Because of Convergence Academies, the work our teachers are doing, and what our students are experiencing, is unlike anything else happening in CPS.*

–Dr. Mike Beyer, Principal, Morrill
Learning Goals

• Persuasive and informative writing
• Data collection and analysis
• Graphic design and visual communication
• Presentation and public speaking
• Scientific understanding of recycling and decomposition

Summary

First graders in Mrs. Orozco’s class were concerned that Morrill didn’t have a recycling program. They noticed how much paper was thrown away every day and used their iPads to research what impact that was having on the environment. Students collected paper trash from their classroom for seven weeks, and discovered that in that time, they were wasting more than 60 pounds of paper, just in one classroom! They decided that something must be done. Mrs. Orozco’s class worked with Principal Beyer and the custodial staff to establish a paper recycling program at the school. They ordered a dumpster and designed paper bins for each classroom so that the paper could be collected and sent to a recycling center. Students created posters and presented their findings at an assembly to inform students and teachers in the school how important it is to recycle. Now, Morrill’s recycling program is up and running, and very successful— all thanks to these first graders!
A school-wide poster campaign encourages students and teachers to recycle.

Ms. Orozco’s students distribute the recycling bins to other classes at an assembly.

Morrill’s new recycling dumpster is delivered!

Students research other recycling campaigns on their iPads.
Work Hard, Play Hard: How do we learn when we play?

Summary

This summer, Morrill’s library will be redesigned as a new 21st century library through the digital atelier—a space for students to explore their interests and create media of their own. To that end, Librarian Ms. Gladkowski and Sean Owens (Morrill’s Digital Atelierista) engaged students in the design process to make sure that the new library becomes a space that the students truly love and that serves all kinds of learners. Students then participated in that same design process to create arcade games for the end-of-the-year school carnival. They drew up plans, built prototypes, observed others playing their games, tweaked the game mechanics and degree of difficulty, and decorated and marketed their games. The last week of school, they debuted their games for the entire school at a carnival where students of all ages tested the games and gave active feedback. It was amazing to see children at Morrill learn by playing games that were designed by their classmates.
Students test out the difficulty of their game.

The school-wide arcade opening.

Younger students testing out the games at the arcade opening.

Diamond and Zakia building their prototype.
Teacher Spotlight: Irma Orozco

Irma Orozco teaches bilingual first graders at Morrill School. She has been an educator for 23 years, with a focus in math and science. Irma has embraced Convergence this year, incorporating digital media and project-based learning into all of her units. Her partnership with her DMM this year, Interdisciplinary artist Michelle Korte-Leccia, embodied a true collaboration. The two would meet on Saturdays for planning and tweaking the project, their ideas building on one another’s about how to take their projects to the next level. “Every time I run into Irma,” says Morrill’s MIS, Liz Radzicki, “she shares with me something new she’s trying or an idea for making things better the next time. That spirit of iteration and experimentation is exactly what we’re trying to build in Convergence Academies.”

“I’ve been wanting to teach this way for a long time, but this year I feel like I have the permission and support to try out my more creative ideas.”

—Irma Orozco
Stan West is an internationally renowned writer, filmmaker, and activist based in Columbia College Chicago's Journalism Department. Stan’s work has covered a range of issues of social justice and African American history, in addition to being a foreign correspondent. This past year, Stan spent time at Morrill, establishing a news room in the middle school social studies and language arts classes. Students identified and analyzed where they typically get their information, then chose their beats and stories they wanted to report on based on their interests. Morrill’s young reporters learned the practices and ethics of journalism, both as powerful producers and critical consumers of media and information. Stan encouraged the middle schoolers to tell their own stories and value their own perspectives on stories that unfold on a local, national, and international level. It was powerful for the students and teachers to collaborate with a professional journalist who is so dedicated to valuing the voices of young people.
Convergence at TILDEN

Photo by Tilden Freshman, Brenda Alcarez
Tilden does not shy away from challenges, so when Convergence began there, we encountered a staff that was ready to push their practice. We were welcomed as thought partners at all levels, from providing instructional leadership, to all-staff personal development (PD), to one-on-one collaborations and coaching. Convergence looked like a lot of different things at Tilden this year. It looked like students taking on real-world roles as journalists, social scientists, designers, artists, authors, and filmmakers. It looked like teachers diving (or dipping a toe) into the use of multimedia texts and performance tasks as well as digital tools. It looked like community issues and events becoming central to classroom work. It looked like hands-on, in-depth PD and careful designing of learning. It looked like partnership and mentorship, for both teachers and students. At times, it was messy! But it was also a learning experience, an exercise in trust building and risk taking, and a process of growth, all of it the perfect setup for an incredible second year.

“Our partnership with Convergence is enabling Tilden to transform student learning and teacher practice. Tilden is now a model neighborhood school in 21st century learning and innovation.”

—Maurice Swinney, Principal, Tilden
Building the Future: Robotics in the classroom

Learning Goals
- Perform calculations
- Apply physics concepts to real world situations
- Identify factors and their effect on reaction time
- Predict how mass can affect movement
- Define and identify accuracy and precision

Summary
In this highly engaging unit, students became designers, creating their own robots that were able to navigate an obstacle course using principles of physics. They built the robots from a kit called Arduino, and used basic computer programming to code the movements the robots would make to maneuver through several courses. Students needed to work in teams and figure out how to fix errors in their calculations or problems with their robots in order to successfully complete the course path. Students were also responsible for filming their robots and documenting their work each day, as well as giving feedback to other groups about their work.
Students test their robot’s movement.

Programming the robot’s course.

Building and re-building robots.
Tilden’s America: News, narratives, and communities

Learning Goals

- Identify the causes of events in non-fiction and the causes of neighborhood problems in their community
- Conduct interviews and analyze the gleaned information via comparison/contrasting
- Write, edit, and publish multimedia news pieces

Summary

In this unit, the classroom became a newsroom. While reading *Our America: Life and Death on the South Side of Chicago*, students in Ms. Holmes’ freshman English class collectively built “Tilden’s America,” a website full of student-created written pieces and audio podcasts that show the realities of the community. The teacher was the editor-in-chief and the students were journalists with specific beats (education, resources, arts, culture, etc.) that they were responsible for researching and writing about. Students prepared features about the most significant problem or celebration they wished to share about their community.

http://tildenamerica.wordpress.com/
Teacher Sharon Holmes helps students with research and writing.

Students define community.

Journalist Suzanne McBride looks on.

A student ponders Ms. Holmes’ question.
Sharon Holmes is an experienced high school teacher but a lifelong learner as well. This year Ms. Holmes designed and implemented two powerful Convergence units. In each instance, she brought a rich idea for a project to the table, and fleshed it out by collaborating with the Digital Media Mentor and Media Integration Specialist. She began by working with DMM Luke Sequeira on a project in which students wrote and recorded audio essays about important stories in their lives. Sharon carefully considered the impact of community events on her students’ lives, and created a project in which their voices were at the center, crafting a new narrative of their community and their school.

“As a result of the deep personal connection between students and their stories each and every student took the time to carefully craft their narrative. The result of this was a vulnerability and intimacy that can be heard in each of the stories. This honesty really helped to make the stories and their execution great.”

—Sharon Holmes
Digital Media Mentor: Amanda Gutierrez

Amanda Gutierrez is a video, animation, and performance artist that has been teaching film and video for more than 10 years to multiple grades and on various topics. For her, media is an interesting and multitasking tool that can be applicable to any teaching setting. She brought this experience to two successful collaborations with Spanish teacher Kristin Cash. The two designed a project in which students in Tilden’s Spanish II class created a stop-motion animation version of the children’s book *Joseph Had a Little Overcoat* in Spanish for students in Morrill’s bilingual second grade. Students were tasked with translating and recording the story, as well as illustrating and filming it using a stop-motion animation app on the iPads. Amanda brought a true sense of project-based learning to the collaboration, and the performance task allowed students to meet Ms. Cash’s goals of becoming more comfortable with spoken Spanish and pronunciation. The Tilden students were motivated by the fact that their work had an authentic purpose for a real world audience.
Looking Ahead to 2014-15

The Digital Atelier

In the Fall of 2014, Convergence Academies will unveil the Digital Atelier at each school. This digital media space is a multimedia laboratory where students can explore learning and making tools including complex creative software (e.g. Adobe Creative Suite), interactive games and media, online learning platforms and digital sound, photo and video production tools. Guided by expert media mentors, students are able to discover new tools and technologies in the Digital Atelier as part of regular classroom activities and during non-classroom time (lunch, afterschool, etc.). The Digital Atelier belongs to students as a safe and inspiring place that supports youth culture and creativity. The Digital Atelier is being made possible by our partnership with Archeworks and Bretford which have contributed to their state of the art design and furnishing.
The Maker Studio

Each Digital Atelier will house a MakerStudio where students can create programmable and expressive objects based on their interests and backgrounds. Using Lego We-Do kits, Little Bits, Squishy Circuits, Makey Makeys, Mindstorm, Cubelets, Scratch and 3D printers, students will be able to create kinetic sculptures programmed to respond to the environment; remote-controlled robots; and video games that explore socially-conscious themes. The hands-on process of making these objects is one that supports curiosity and play as students apply principals of art, design, science, engineering, math and technology to solve problems.

The MakerStudio is all about making learning fun and engaging. Through our partnership with The Plug-in Studio and Fuse Studio, students and teachers can experience for themselves each of the six pillars of the Convergence Academies learning model.

The Six Pillars of Convergence

- Collaboration
- Play
- Choice of Expression
- Authentic Participation
- Critical Response
- Iterative Learning
About Us

About the Convergence Academies
Supported by the Investing in Innovation Fund of the U.S. Department of Education, the Convergence Academies is a three-year demonstration project led by the Center for Community Arts Partnerships (CCAP) at Columbia College Chicago. Convergence Academies is collaborating with Chicago Public Schools (CPS) to implement a whole school model that supports 21st Century learning by integrating digital media and technology into curriculum, instruction, learning, and culture across two entire schools.

About the Center for Community Arts Partnerships at Columbia College Chicago
Columbia College Chicago, an urban institution committed to open access, opportunity and excellence in higher education, provides innovative degree programs in the visual, performing, media and communication arts to more than 10,000 undergraduate and graduate students. The Center for Community Arts Partnerships was established in 1998 to carry out the College’s commitment to community engagement. CCAP creates deep, reciprocal, mutually beneficial partnerships across the Chicago metropolitan region to extend the learning environment for underserved children and youth as well as for college students and faculty.

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