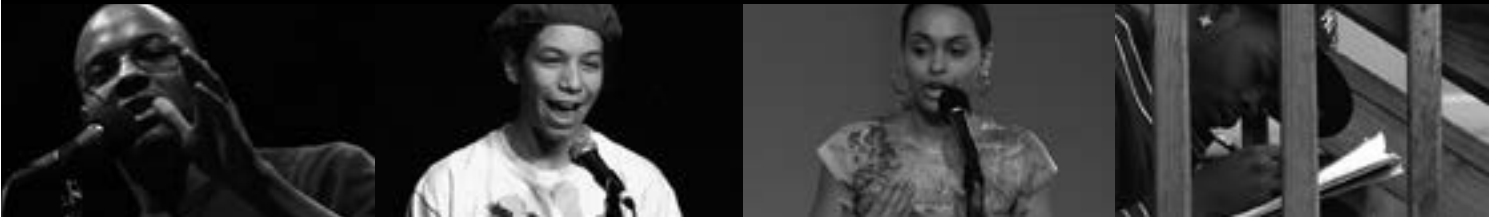


**LOUDER
THAN
A BOMB**



LOUDER THAN A BOMB TOOLBOX

Many “toolkits” are comprised of compartmentalized do-it-yourself contents. Young Chicago Authors’ toolbox takes a participatory and immersive approach with our resources. Here, collaboration and engagement bring materials to life as we co-create workshops, professional development opportunities, and the festival locally with students, teachers, educators, activists, organizers, and poets.

Through an interactive three-phase process—**“Getting Ready to Get Ready”**, **“Getting Ready”**, and **“Ready”**—our stakeholders will participate in cyclical methods of planning, taking action, observing, evaluating, and critical reflection prior to moving to the next phase. The contents in our toolbox are dynamic and involve direct sharing which is mutually beneficial to both YCA and our partners.

Let’s build together!

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“Knowledge emerges [through praxis] -- invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other”
- Paulo Freire

You are probably reading this toolkit because you saw the Louder Than a Bomb documentary film, are a poet with a vested interest in the art of spoken word poetry, are a teacher who is looking for a way to integrate writing into the lives of your students in a deeper and more meaningful way, or maybe some other reason entirely. Whatever the reason may be, you are interested in the Louder Than a Bomb Youth Poetry Festival.

Since the release of the LTAB documentary film in 2011, Young Chicago Authors has received hundreds of emails and phone calls, and has had individual meetings with folks who showed interest in starting a LTAB in their city. This toolbox is a response to interested and valued stakeholders.

In producing this guide, we at Young Chicago Authors wrestled with our approaches. Luckily we see these materials as malleable, flexible, and open to ongoing additions and changes. And as Kevin Coval put it the other day, “creating the toolkit is like creating a type of Bible-- it has contributions from tons of people and takes a hell of a long time to write.” In this, Kevin is absolutely right: the LTAB toolbox is a sort of living document and we would love to have your contributions, too.

Some of the questions we asked ourselves in generating the framework of the toolkit are: Why are we creating a toolbox? How does YCA use the momentum of film to organically and healthfully grow participation in LTAB? How can we guard against merely creating a “how-to” guide that can be forceful, passive, and heavily layered in top down approaches? Can we create materials that will bring about localized dependency around organizing the festival so as to not foster a ubiquitous slam that will ultimately be unsustainable? What would participation in LTAB “name of other city” look like?

We realized in order to create a toolbox addressing these questions we needed to develop a porous and thought-provoking guide situated around both critical pedagogy and immersive participation. So, here are the beginning workings of the LTAB toolbox. We welcome your thoughts and contributions!

GETTING READY TO GET READY

The first objective in unpacking the toolbox is knowledge generation about Louder Than a Bomb (LTAB). Gaining an understanding of the philosophy behind the work is the first step to planning. The LTAB toolbox will help you get started.

The “Getting Ready to Get Ready” portion of the toolbox is made up of text-based materials. Take some time to read through and critically think about what is included and how you might uniquely take ownership of the materials.

“Slam is a paradoxical game. The paradox, or “the joke” of the slam is that it mimics the values of competition- the bloodlust to win at all costs, and hierarchies based on pecking orders of winners and losers. However, the real aim of the slam has nothing to do with these values.” – Anna West

WHY

Louder Than a Bomb (LTAB) was founded in 2001 after the Twin Towers fell and during a time when young people of color in Chicago were being targeted by an anti-gang loitering law which aimed to take away their right to assemble in groups of more than two. In the midst of political and cultural unrest, two Chicago-based poets—Kevin Coval and Anna West—and a group of educators including Peter Kahn created a space for youth to congregate and express themselves through the writing and performing of spoken word poetry. Although hesitant to appropriate the public platform known as “the poetry slam”, which was created by Chicagoan Mark Smith, Coval and West saw his model as a way to galvanize publics to listen to the stories being told by young people.

More than a decade has passed since LTAB began, and the purpose and focus of the slam has not changed. The slam is not about the competition. It is a vehicle to engage young people and audiences in creating counter-narratives —new narratives to re-imagine the self and one another.

HOW

LTAB is based on realist portraiture and the telling of authentic stories through the vehicle of the slam. Here the points earned in the slam are not about the points at all, but rather about the poetry. LTAB believes the process of writing poetry about one’s own life generates greater personal confidence, an improved sense of agency, a broader understanding about who one is as an individual and as part of a collective of writers located in a particular neighborhood and city. LTAB’s artistic process is about students imagining and re-imagining who they are in the world they inhabit.

LTAB is founded on a student-centered critical and public pedagogy geared toward young people ages 13 – 19. LTAB believes the slam is just the beginning or culminating event of year-round meaningful instruction. Here students partner with their teachers, and teachers with students, in order to create and facilitate a safe space for individual and collective expression-- everything finds its way back to the students’ own lives. LTAB provides a variety of year-round public platforms for students to perform their work. LTAB’s teaching develops an individual’s and collective’s ability to critically read, write, and think about the world they inhabit.

LTAB is rooted in intentional grassroots community organizing that brings together all neighborhoods within a city. LTAB’s belief in actively engaging young cultural citizens from all highways and byways of our city results in a more integrated and understanding society. Young people learn about folks they might not have otherwise ever met and, as a result of cultural grounding, they develop mutual respect and tolerance for

WHY & HOW

difference. After more than a decade of intentional work in the city of Chicago, LTAB has become the largest youth poetry slam in the world. One could measure success by counting the number of participants and audience members who attend the slam—which as of 2012 was 10,000. However we evaluate our impact in relation to student development, program design, and short and long term partnerships all of which are founded in the areas of artistry, teaching, and activism. Taking a holistic approach, we strive to help grow the field of youth spoken word poetry in general—this can only be done through the joint efforts of risk-taking partners.

CHECK THE VIEW POINT *BY KEVIN COVAL*

“The trick of the poetry slam is to use the guise of competition to attract interest in [the telling of stories through the written word]. The slam builds a natural drama in a short time span while showcasing the multiplicity of stories and voices in a given venue or classroom.” – Kevin Coval, Co-founder of Louder Than a Bomb

In the winter of 2001 a group of writers, educators, writing/educators, and courageous young poets, working with the not-for-profit organization Young Chicago Authors, responded to this historic and hostile moment by creating a public pedagogy, a cultural space, a radically democratic forum to air and profess and spit and kick what was on their mind. Louder Than A Bomb: The Chicago Teen Poetry Slam formed and gathered in the basement of a storefront theater. Since 2001, the festival has grown, attracting over 6,000 people during the course of the three-week festival to hear 650 young poets from more than 50 high schools and community organizations read poems. Louder Than A Bomb reaches into almost every neighborhood in a city of redlines and viaducts to create poly-cultural spaces where young people can share the stories of who they are, where they come from, and what they feel about the world(s) around them. Through a personal account, this essay outlines the methodology and pedagogy that make up what is today the philosophy behind the largest youth poetry festival in the world—Louder Than a Bomb.

INFLUENCED AND INFLUENCING

Before she passed away, I had the privilege of hearing Gwendolyn Brooks speak to various sized audiences in bookstores, classrooms, and theaters in Chicago. She was a small woman whose eyes saw everything and whose talks would turn often to a discussion of the writing process. She would tell rooms filled with emerging and would-be-writers that our responsibility was to tell the story in front of our nose. And it took a while for me to really digest the enormity of that statement. I had heard it from her lips perhaps a half dozen times and turned that stone over in my hands hundreds perhaps thousands of times until something clicked.

I think it was while listening, for the millionth time, to KRS-ONE's classic 1990 release Loves Gonna Get'cha on the Edutainment album, a first person narrative about a young man who makes difficult decisions and suffers the consequences in the first decade of the war on drugs—the continued but newly named war on communities and bodies of color. In this rhyme, KRS says what foodstuffs are on the shelf of his mother's kitchen, describes his walk home from school, and his specific enough to number the pairs of pants is brother and he share.

Hip-Hop has always been specific. From the time it became a national and global export, the cities and suburbs around the planet knew the slang, street names, and conditions of several boroughs in New York. Eventually this poetics of place and the specificity of block, neighborhood, and region began to affect emerging poets outside of New York as well. Hip-Hop found its 'roots' in other cities after the initial imitation of style dissipates and an indigenous sound, style, and poetics takes shape. The South was

CHECK THE VIEW POINT *BY KEVIN COVAL*

primarily unheard from until Outkast and Goodie Mob brought locality into their aesthetic both sonically and syntactically, choosing subject matter that resonated in Atlanta and other southern cities.

Similar to how Jazz music birthed an aesthetic transformation of arts in the 1950s, the play and freedom of improvisation helping to create The Black Arts Movement, Abstract Expressionism, The Beats, Nuyorican Poetry, Afri-Cobra Painters in Chicago, the aesthetic innovations of Hip-Hop music and culture have given rise to a generation of poets who are engaged in the (re)presentation of location and self. Around the country, a new poetry is emerging written by the deliberately silenced and the preferably unheard. A new excitement around language and hyper-literacy is festering in the notebooks and laptops of young, fierce poet-journalists who gather at open mics, compete in poetry slams, share and build together in public and virtual ciphers, a growing network of word workers who, as Talib Kweli and Mos Def put it, are real life documentarians.

Around the country, poets gather in large forums, such as Brave New Voices: The National Youth Poetry Festival, and in smaller arenas, such as open mics in cities and towns from Bellingham, Washington, to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, with their notebooks and stories to tell. As of November 4, 2008, with the election of Barack Obama, Chicago became the official center of the universe, something I have known and megaphoned about for some time. But in Chicago, going on 10 years, the largest youth poetry festival in the world, Louder Than A Bomb, has emerged as a public pedagogy in order to hear many disparate voices in a radically segregated city and has served as tool to keep students in school in a failing public system where a freshman's chances of graduating are 50/50. This is the story of how and why the youth poetry work in Chicago exists, how it is transforming public cultural and educational space, why what the young writers are saying is freshly imperative in affecting public discourse, and why we must all listen to their poems.

Chicago in the New Millennium (Park)
Outta the city, they want us gone
Tearin down the 'jects creatin plush homes
My circumstance is between Cabrini and Love Jones
Surrounded by hate, yet I love home
Common, on Black Star's Respiration

In 2001, it seemed the world was collapsing. Before the towers fell, young people of color around the country were being (and continue to be) brutalized, criminalized, imprisoned, disenfranchised, and failed by public institutions and public education. The Chicago City Council was working on cementing its anti-gang loitering law, a racist policy similar to Proposition 187 in the Bay Area, which would have denied the right to assemble if you were young and of color and lived in certain neighborhoods. Teenagers were literally being ripped from their stoops for hanging out in groups of more than one on the suspicion they might be conducting gang activity. At the same time Black and Latino youth were being round up for how they looked, Muslims and Brown persons were suspects of terrorism. Xenophobic jingoism was at a red alert American high and the few who shaped public discourse encouraged the flag waving and a cessation of

CHECK THE VIEW POINT *BY KEVIN COVAL*

civil liberties. It is within this societal turmoil that Louder Than a Bomb was established.

GROUND WORK

In 1996, my best friend Eboo Patel invited me to teach a writing workshop at El Cuarto Ano, an alternative high school on Chicago's near west side. The school serves mostly Latino and Black students who failed out of, dropped out of, or were kicked out of Chicago Public Schools. I had never taught before, and never had an interest in teaching. Eboo knew of my participation in the emerging Hip-Hip and spoken word scene in the city and felt my presence would be helpful to his students.

The class and I spent the hour and half talking about *The Score*, the new and incredibly dope second record by the Fugees, the New Jersey-based Hip-Hop crew with Lauryn Hill. I was certain this was to be the first and last time I'd be invited into a classroom. Afterward, I apologized to Eboo for taking up so much time. To my surprise, he told me I was a teacher, said his students were engaged in a conversation about language and politics in a way he had not seen, and invited me back for my first poet-in-residence gig, teaching a couple of weeks at the school and trying to get the students to write their own rhymes/poems/prose about the spaces they inhabit.

I was 21 years old at the time, some of my students a few years younger. We shared a generational and cultural language via Hip-Hop. Though there were some incredible differences between and among us, we found a shared space, mad excited about breaking down Hip-Hop records and discussing the poetics of these emcees.

During this time, I began to hear about and meet some of my peers performing around Chicago--writers engaged in similar educational work. Some of these artists, activists, and teachers were Avery R. Young, Tara Betts, Tyehimba Jess, Quraysh Ali Lansana, Peter Kahn, and Anna West-- a tall White girl from Baton Rouge, who worked at a not-for-profit organization know as Young Chicago Authors. Anna introduced me to Bob Boone, YCA's founder, and Bob invited me to work with his organization.

Via the conversations among these poet/educators, we collectively realized we were meeting and hearing hundreds of young writers from many different sides of the city who were hungry for language and storytelling and engaged in the classroom in a new way. Initially, we wanted to provide a space where we the teachers could come together to share curriculum ideas and learn from each other about books to use, strategies, pitfalls, and other ideas. Through Young Chicago Authors, Anna and I started the Writing Teachers Collective in 1999.

The collective was a kind of community organizing tool. We had poets who taught and wanted to teach, teachers who wrote and wanted to use writing in their classroom, administrators who wanted to integrate creative writing into new and ridiculous state standards, community arts organizations engaging youth, and some senior students who showed interest in teaching creative writing/spoken work/Hip-Hop poetry to

other students.

These meetings provided insight and glimpses into an emerging youth culture in Chicago, one focused on the delight of wordplay and the practice of real life documentary, of recording the experiences of overlooked neighborhoods and airing these reports in the classroom or an open mic. The writing teachers were beginning to share the potential for a new, public pedagogy, and the work being produced needed a central space to be heard and seen by its distant neighborhood cousins. Through the Writing Teachers Collective, the idea for a city-wide teen poetry slam emerged

Poetry was a dead art to many eighties babies, who saw it as something done only by dead White dudes. Boring as watching birchwood flake and fall, roses wither, and milk curdle. My generation of writers was awakened by the public orality of Hip-Hop music and culture. KRS-ONE called himself a poet. The lyricism of Rakim, Chuck D, MC Lyte and other young, primarily NYC-based emcees astounded our eardrums as we memorized the words of these borough exports.

Most of these emcees were explicit in their participation in an alternate canon of verse. They shouted out and sampled The Last Poets, Gil Scott-Heron, and Nikki Giovanni, and sent many of us running to the library to find writers like Amiri Baraka, Sonia Sanchez, the Nuyorican School Poets and the Beats. Hip-Hop opened the possibility of the poetic. A new generation of writers was digging on literature outside the academy and discovering our favorite writers were alive and fresh, not stale, dead or boring (Jorie Graham) crackers.

Through these meetings of The Writing Teachers Collective, we shared best practices around an expanding and contemporary alternative canon. We found our students were responding to the poems of Willie Perdomo, Patricia Smith, Luis Rodriguez, and other alive writers engaged like Hip-Hop emcees in the location and poetics of place. We began to read these writers in the classroom alongside the text of emcees like Jay-Z. If Jay was talking about The Marcy Projects and Willie was talking about Spanish Harlem, it was a very small leap to have the students begin writing, too, about where they lived, whether it is was on the West Side or in the Western Suburbs or the West Coast. We were finding the poetics of place as an important and simple jump-off point to begin the process of engaging young writers.

I have thought for some time Hip-Hip was Freirean before we (Hip-Hop generation folks) read Freire. It was and continues to be amazingly disconcerting how little of the students' lives are brought into the classroom. Through the use of contemporary Hip-Hop poetry, we do just that. We invert the traditional and played paradigm of teacher-all-knowing and ask students what they think, see, experience in their lives. In Chicago we wonder why the public schools are failing, why students stop coming to school. It is because they are rarely if ever asked to be present, to present or represent their actual, everyday lives within the walls of an institution they spend more time in than anywhere else. Yet the teachable moments are abundant. Chicago, like most major American cities, is undergoing a gigantic and ferocious process of gentrification. All of our students are affected by this process, which is tied to global economics, the history of urban labor and southern migration, and a billion other topics to study. Students negotiate the changes they experience

CHECK THE VIEW POINT *BY KEVIN COVAL*

on a near daily basis, how their home is shifting radically before their eyes, and yet we continue to have them to read and discuss Beowulf? Are you kidding?

Simply, we believe in the record, in pictures people paint, and the importance of the act of recoding and keeping a public, communal, and multi-voiced narrative of time. If we continue to rely on the same people to pen novels and write history, they will continue to tell us Robert Frost is fresh and Columbus discovered America. And we all know better than that. If we want students to be whole people in the classroom, we should ask them about the lives they lead every day. And how their lives are not only connected to history, but that they are vibrant actors within history. If we do not do this, we will get the same old—a broken public school system and a student body struggling to stay awake because the teachers and administrators are sleeping on the stories and bodies right in front of their nose.

WHAT IS A POETRY SLAM?

The Poetry Slam began in Chicago when a poet/construction worker named Marc Smith, who writes in the tradition of Carl Sandburg—realist portraits of people who work—stood on top a table at a bar on the north side of Chicago, recited a poem and received scores from his fellow workers as if he were an Olympian. Since this night in 1985, Marc has hosted the longest running open mic in the country, every Sunday night at The Green Mill at Broadway and Lawrence in Chicago’s Uptown neighborhood.

Marc Smith is an organic intellectual in the tradition of Gramsci who practices a radical democracy through The Poetry Slam. The Slam’s rules are somewhat silly and flexible, but basically anyone and everyone has the opportunity to read a poem within a three minute time limit. Top scoring poets will advance to the next round, and the winner at the end of the night receives \$10—which is the cost of signing up to compete. This night at The Green Mill has been a blueprint for other slams and open mics around the country and has helped shape the stage for a National Poetry Slam.

Implicit in the inclusive, democratic principles of the open mic and poetry slam is an active listening. Slams may take up to two hours, and a poet may read as many as four poems. Therefore during most of the “bout”—the other 108 minutes—they are listening to the stories of others who may not come from the same places they do. The National Poetry Slam can become a Dungeons and Dragons convention, a kettle of minutia and rules, boiling over in dorkery. However, as a public pedagogy in a segregated city among youth who rarely leave their neighborhoods, the poetry slam has exposed thousands of young people to the power of their own voices and to the realities of others who look nothing like them and come from different places.

The trick of the poetry slam is to use the guise of competition to attract interest in orality. The slam builds a natural drama in a short time span while showcasing the multiplicity of stories and voices in a given venue or classroom. In the slam, a common phrase shared among hosts and poets is, “the point is not the point, the point is the poetry.” And though the merit of some poems in the slam is debatable (just like the merit of some of the poems in the Norton Anthology and Poetry Magazine) Marc’s intention was to build an audience

CHECK THE VIEW POINT *BY KEVIN COVAL*

for orality, poetry, literature, and storytelling. And three decades later there are slams and open mics in almost every large and mid-sized city in the country and many slams emerging overseas. Perhaps audience members come for the novelty and competition of the slam, but on a good night they receive an articulated truth from someone they have never met before. They participate in a public pedagogy, a radically democratic forum to air the concerns and dreams of a polity via prose. The open mic becomes the missing town hall, the absent square in the city center, the ancient and indigenous need we faintly recall to hear his/her stories from the mouths of those who experience them.

WHY LOUDER THAN A BOMB

Louder Than A Bomb: The Chicago Teen Poetry Slam was named after the Public Enemy (PE) song on their 1988 record *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*. Jacking the title from PE serves several functions. First, it tributes perhaps the most important Hip-Hop record ever made (this is contentious among Hip-Hop heads). The record is an aesthetic manifesto, a mash-up masterpiece from PE's production crew, The Bomb Squad. Their sampling and sonic symphonic thickness is the soundtrack of what some would call post-modernity, and others the awakening consciousness of the largest global youth culture in the planet's history, constructed and made by people history typically and systematically denies. Public Enemy was, and remains, an assault on the aural landscape of White Supremacist America.

Second, Chuck D, the group's main emcee, was one of the first poets I, and many of my generation, felt. He challenged my vocabulary and sent me running to the library to decode his verse. His percussive syntax and bass-heavy voice enriched the polyphone that is a PE record. Chuck D was my gateway to literature, to an engaged poetic, to what KRS-ONE calls, "lyrical terrorism," the power of meticulously crafted spoken words which are conscious of audience, and which trust the audience's flexible ear and ability to grow.

The third reason we jacked the title was the political/cultural moment we inhabited. People of color in Chicago and around the globe were, and are, criminalized in the suspicion of their skin. America was, and is, dropping bombs, detaining bodies, creating McCarthyism on Muslims and persons of color who organize themselves into communities resistant to hegemonic ideals. The young writers we were meeting in the classroom, at the open mic, in the community centers and homeless shelters, the public and alternative schools, lived very differently than how dominant culture portrayed, betrayed, and treated them. We were, and are, living in a historic moment where more money is spent to house their bodies in prisons than in schools.

We named The Chicago Teen Poetry Festival, "Louder Than A Bomb" because we are Freedom Dreamers like Robin Kelly and believe the stories and words and voices of young people are more powerful than weapons, more influential than government, more monumental than any war memorial, more impressive and brilliant than a commander-in-chief. We feel what young people have to say about the world they inhabit and inherit and hope to construct is more useful than armament, more complex than prison industrial systems, and louder than any bomb.

POEMS AND POETS

The writers who participate in Louder Than A Bomb are 13 to 19 years old and come from all over the city, repping every neighborhood, socioeconomic class, race, and sexual orientation. Along gender lines, our poets are about 60% young women and 40% young men. Poets write original pieces and work as a team to create a group piece for the final round of competition. The content is open and the poems broadly reflect the spectrum of human experience: the mundane, the brilliant, the beautiful, and the brutal. By the end of a 90-minute slam poetry bout, I have usually cried, laughed, and shook my head in disbelief at the absurdity and profundity of the teen mind.

During the course of a poetry slam bout, we will hear disparate voices from all over the city. Alone they are powerful unto themselves, collectively they come to sound like the city itself. And the city sounds like the country, and the country is vast. And this is what we think democracy sounds like. And we believe in democracy, the open-air public practice and pedagogy. We believe our problems and celebrations should be heard in the sold-out music hall or open-mic coffee shop or egalitarian classroom. Louder Than A Bomb is a form and forum of youth culture that seeks to showcase the poly-cultural reality we inhabit.

Implicit in the construction of this public pedagogy is the consideration and knowledge that the world is inhabited by narratives of folks who might live on our block and those who may live neighborhoods and lifestyles away, but in this form and forum is the desire, the message, the monotony of hegemony, to challenge the common sense and dominant cultural practice of silence and segregation. Everyone has a story to tell, a grandmother who cooks ethnic foods, an embarrassing moment, a humanizing realization, a gross tidbit, all survive the horror and humor of existence that make the poetry of our everyday lives. The details and language of these experiences, we crave, publicly, our internal visions and utopian dreams manifest in the spaces we seek to create and kick it in.

WALKING AND ASKING: TOWARDS PRAXIS IN YOUTH SPOKEN WORD POETRY**BY ANNA WEST**

It is essential that we make clear, especially at this moment of expansion for the field, the centrality of connecting people to one another, recognizing and engaging relationships, and leveraging those relationships to build power locally. – Anna West, Co-founder of Louder Than a Bomb

We didn't know that any of this would happen.

Twelve years ago, when Peter Kahn suggested to Kevin Coval and me that we organize a slam festival for youth in Chicago, we didn't even know if we wanted to. We knew we wanted to build platforms for youth poetry and we knew we wanted to build with one another— with this expanding community of young poets, poet-educators and teachers of writing. Those were the reasons why we'd started the Writing Teachers' Collective, a monthly workshop and dialogue for educators at Young Chicago Authors. It was after one of those workshops at YCA, around the kitchen table that we'd hauled up the narrow stairs a month earlier, that we began to consider what it would mean to put together a youth poetry slam festival.

The truth is that we felt ambivalent about the slam as a format. Many of the poets and teachers involved in building Louder Than a Bomb had been around the adult slam world long enough to know that there were some pitfalls. Slam is a paradoxical game. The paradox, or "the joke", of the slam is that it mimics the values of competition- the bloodlust to win at all costs, and hierarchies based on pecking orders of winners and losers. However, the real aim of the slam has nothing to do with these values. Its competition is ironic, a gimmick to bring in a wider audience, a source of spectacle and fun, basically: a game. We knew from the start that people could have trouble reading the irony of that game, of understanding the larger purposes and aims of the form. Nevertheless, we decided to take Pete up on his idea, to take on, among all of the other youth spoken word poetry projects we were pouring our energies into, the organizing work of a youth slam festival.

Why did we decide to take on this experiment? What are the larger purposes and aims that our community had in taking on this work, and how do we continue to see those purposes and aims expressed in the various forms of practice that characterize youth spoken word (YSW), the workshops, open-mics, and slam? How do we think about these forms as we engage them in the context of youth development? It is around these questions that I want to share some of my thoughts here.

I take up those questions right now from the point of view of an YSW organizer and educator. I had my own trial-by-fire education as poet, poet-educator and poet-educator-organizer in Chicago. In 2005, after 10 years in Chicago, I moved to my hometown, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to extend and build on the work we'd been doing in Chicago. I met collaborators there with whom I started WordPlay Teen Writing Project. Most recently, I've been looking at the work from the perspective of a researcher and student, first in Harvard's Arts in Education program and now as a doctoral student in English and Cultural Studies at Louisiana State University. Throughout this time, I've had the privilege of working with Dr. Susan Weinstein, as a professor,

WALKING AND ASKING: TOWARDS PRAXIS IN YOUTH SPOKEN WORD POETRY***BY ANNA WEST***

mentor and collaborator. She and I have worked closely together over the last year, analyzing over five years worth of ethnographic interviews she has done with YSW participants around the globe.

For those of us who have been involved for a length of time in YSW and its various forms, questions about our aims and purposes may seem elementary- the things we've talked about for years in both our personal relationships and public work with one another. However, I think it is important for us to begin to document our theories about YSW, to think about how we can situate those theories within the discourses from which they both emerge and into which they feed- critical arts pedagogy, cultural organizing and youth development, to name just a few. This process of naming is one that is discovered in dialogue with one another. Without such dialogue, it is difficult for our field of practice to be reflexive. That is, to constantly examine the effects of our work and hold those effects up to the values that drive us, intervening when those values may be at risk. In Paulo Freire's terms, this is the work of praxis, "action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it" (1986, p. 36). I am interested in thinking about how the field of YSW practitioners can make good on the reflective aspect of praxis. How do we open those spaces for dialogue among the totally diverse situations in which YSW is being practiced?

I am interested in looking at these questions not only as a veteran of Young Chicago Authors, as someone connected to that expansive community I first met in basement open-mics where the Blue Line rumbled its way into poems, or climbing up the creaking stairs at 2049 W. Division Street; I am also interested in speaking as someone who is part of a community that has carried that work to other locations and, like so many others, taken root in other soils. My writing, therefore, is cast towards the multidirectional, de-centered spheres of circulation, what we might call the YSW field, or if we're feeling bold about it- the YSW movement. I think it is important to set the stage by looking at the context of that movement, and trying to chart the sheer complexity of the moment in which we find ourselves today.

THE EXPANDING YOUTH SPOKEN WORD FIELD

We have only been able to point to the existence of this field for about 15 years, although clearly YSW has its roots in a number of tributaries such as hip-hop, the Black Arts Movement, the Beats, and truthfully, the diverse and ancient practices of oral poetry. There are very few organizations whose work centers on YSW; I estimate fewer than seven organizations in the U.S. that have budgets larger than 200K dedicated to this kind of programming. The majority of the teachers and cultural workers who are engaging youth in YSW are in grassroots organizations, driven by volunteer or semi- volunteer staff, or operating at the margins of other institutional contexts like schools or more broadly focused youth development agencies. In many cases, youth are creating the spaces for YSW to be practiced, galvanizing the resources and supports needed to make such spaces available to themselves and their peers. Whatever the case, this much is evident: 1) it is difficult to point to a field without eliding the diversity of contexts in which YSW is taking place, and 2) what we think of as YSW has, to this point, always indicated a participatory, interactive

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community-of-practice, spaces where the craft of critical-imaginative listening is in dynamic interplay with the crafts of critical-imaginative writing and performance.

In spite of our small, grassroots dynamic, the pressure on the YSW field to figure out how to build the spaces for field-wide dialogue and reflection are growing greater by the day. This pressure stems from the success of our work and from the fact that we're growing; having been around for 15-20 years changes things, and an audience for YSW has developed. To use LTAB as an example (though this pattern exists all over the place), our first LTAB festival in the year 2000 had an audience of maybe 400-500 people with 40 or so poet-participants. Today, the audience is over 10,000 people with 650 poet-participants, maybe more. Embedded in this kind of expansion is the mathematics of grassroots participation, an idea that I will come back to later. Let's just say, for the time being, it is worth noting that participation in YSW has expanded immensely in the last 10 years primarily through networks of people connected at grassroots levels, rather than marketing budgets.

This has, naturally, drawn the attention of people involved in other kinds of projects. Academics have begun to pay attention; two book-length studies about individual YSW programs have come out (Fisher, 2007; Jocson, 2008) and there is a bibliography of some fifteen or so scholarly articles at this point. A handful of universities have begun to offer programs and coursework that engage the pedagogies of spoken word poetry, usually in conjunction with a broadening discourse of hip-hop pedagogy.

Another big move for YSW programs in the last five years has been the rise in television programs and independent films featuring YSW as a subject. Five major productions on YSW were released between 2009 and 2011: Russell Simmons Presents Brave New Voices (a seven-part, 2009 HBO series with a 2010 one-episode follow-up), The Knicks Poetry Slam (a television series aired annually since 2009 on the Madison Square Garden Network), and the documentary films (all coming out in the same year) Louder Than a Bomb (2010), To Be Heard (2011), and We Are Poets (2011).

Those of us connected to LTAB know well the euphoria and visibility that is created by having Greg Jacobs and Jon Siskel's film in circulation. We can also look around and see clearly that the combination of these film and media projects means that the sphere of representation for YSW has blown up to new proportions. We are in this moment, as a field, of looking at ourselves, looking at these representations, and asking ourselves "What does this mean? Are our values and purposes represented here? (Sadly, they may not be in 100% of these projects.) How do we harness this visibility to enlarge participation? What new opportunities does this kind of visibility bring?"

We are also figuring out how to respond to the enlarged interest in our work from teachers, organizers and poets from various parts of the U.S. and even the world. The LTAB film has created a way to share the values and meaning of YSW with people in disparate places. I saw this happen in Massachusetts last year, where a small group of LTAB alumni and YSW artists and teachers from that area were able to use the film

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to leverage a larger vision for YSW programming in Massachusetts. The film, coupled with the grassroots organizing of the group Mass L.E.A.P. (Literary Education and Performance) brought people together to build their local community's capacity to organize YSW programs. In just a few weeks from the time that I am writing this, they are launching their own LTAB festival to complement another host of YSW programs now happening throughout the year in Massachusetts.

It is important to emphasize the degree to which grassroots organizing is needed on the ground of local communities in order to build any new site of practice in the field. This is, of course, also true for all of those spaces in which there are already thriving YSW programs and communities. I worry sometimes that the phenomenon of celebrity that surrounds any kind of successful mass media project (and especially ones coupled with the spectacle of slam) can elide the complexity of the relational work that is needed to generate power from within new sites of practice. It is essential that we make clear, especially at this moment of expansion for the field, the centrality of connecting people to one another, recognizing and engaging relationships, and leveraging those relationships to build power locally. YSW programs and communities are, in many senses, built from these relational dynamics, from call and responsiveness, from generating power by opening participation.

TRANSGRESSING AND TRANSFORMING THE BOUNDARIES OF PARTICIPATION

John Gaventa, borrowing an idea from Steven Lukes, writes about the invisible face of power, that which “shapes the psychological and ideological boundaries of participation” (7). Lukes’ conception of power traces three faces. To track power you must first ask, who gains? Second, who decides? And third, who sets the agenda? That is, whose concerns even achieve representation in the sphere where decisions are arbitrated? It is this invisible third face, according to Gaventa, that defines who may gain entry into the “psychological and ideological boundaries of participation.”

I believe that the central-most aim of YSW is to transgress at the level of those invisible boundaries of participation. This is not merely a project of who gets to participate, but it is also a project that sets out to change the very codes of how participation works, to challenge and ultimately invert a value system that upholds asymmetrical participation. The driving belief behind YSW is that we live within a discursive imaginary and a narrated reality, where systems of representation and meaning making uphold the interests of the few instead of the many. Who narrates this “reality”? How is it narrated? How can we radically shift the modes of narration in order to produce better systems of representation and meaning making?

It only follows, then, that the forms of this participation in YSW are aesthetic ones: imaginative writing and the embodied presentation of that writing in public spaces through performance. There is a lot that can be said about what writing, literacy, and performance mean with regards to participation in civic discourse (read Paulo Friere, Augusto Boal, Frederick Douglass, etc.). I don’t want to try to take on those ideas in their totality here, but I do want to share what I think is an eloquent articulation put forth by the teacher

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Joe Ubiles, as described in Maisha Fisher's book, *Writing in Rhythm* (2007). Joe challenges students to see writing as a way to move beyond what he calls their "ascribed lives" (p. 16). He tells them, "in this house, we are trying to dream ourselves a world, and we are trying to record that world in the script of the English language" (p. 3). What Joe is telling his students is that their work together in their writing workshop is explicitly the work of counter-narration, to re-write the selves that have been produced for them, and to claim their agency as writers of their lives and their world.

The practices of counter-narration are visible in the texts of YSW, that is, what youth poets choose to write about and how. However, these practices are also encoded in the forms through which YSW is practiced. I think it is important to think about YSW forms as the spaces of participation themselves- those being the workshop, the open-mic, and the slam. My interest as a teacher, organizer and researcher all lead me to a fascination with these forms of practice. I am curious about how the more traditional methods of reading text, which tend to put an emphasis on what is written and who is writing, do not entirely get at how these participatory spaces inform the modes of writing.

Because spoken word is above all else situated in a live, performance context, it seems that the primary thing to focus on about the form is the dynamics of exchange between writers and readers (or audiences). These audiences within the YSW discourse are not passive consumers of text, but rather they are active co-constructors of meaning. An audience, however, must be qualified in this role as active listeners; they must be literate readers of the form. An audience must be initiated.

THE POWER OF AN INITIATED AUDIENCE

Let me tell a story that illustrates what I mean by the importance of an initiated audience.

In 2005, I moved from Chicago to Baton Rouge to start WordPlay. I hadn't lived in Baton Rouge since I was 17 years old and now I was 30, so this was a leap into the unknown for me. In Chicago, the organizing that I'd been doing was linked in with a whole range of other poets and teaching artists and people doing critical youth arts work. So, in Chicago, there was this work of weaving and connecting and in Baton Rouge I felt this pressure to just...invent it from the ground up.

This pressure was even greater because it was the fall of 2005, which means that we were a state turned on our heads by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Because of the displacement of large numbers of people from their homes in New Orleans and other parts of the state, the population of Baton Rouge had grown by 200,000 that fall. The schools were in a state of upheaval, and I had, just before all of this, secured \$20,000 in funding with which I hired myself as the only staff person for the newly founded WordPlay. The first thing that I did was get into some schools and get teachers to sign up for a residency program in which I would come into their classrooms. There were 5 schools involved that first year. Here were a few of the promises I made to get in the door-- I will, with poetry, in a matter of months, get your students to not only

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become better writers, but to actually... like writing.

I think it sounded to people like I was selling snake oil! Especially when you consider that the only evidence I had to back this up was the legacy of what I'd done in Chicago. People in the South are resistant, and for good reason, to Northerners coming in to "save them." Especially after Katrina, when we saw an influx of do-gooders pedaling yoga and art therapy to people who had lost their homes and livelihoods. I think people had good reason to question what was so critical about youth poetry at a time like that, and I felt the serious responsibility to make sure that what happened in those classrooms be something real.

In spite of this commitment, I was caught in the mythology of "building it from the ground up," which is essentially a myth of "bringing" something- like poetry- to a place where it is not being practiced already. Under the influence of this mythology, I was going into classrooms and bringing my own poems, bringing in the poems we used in Chicago, bringing in other adult spoken word poets from Baton Rouge, and bringing DVDs and CDs to show my students youth poets performing in Chicago. I was doing all of this bringing because I know that this thing works through a process of modeling, that youth see their peers and other models who are close to them and this is what sparks the sense of invitation to participate, that sort of simultaneous understanding of I want to do that, and It is possible for me to do that.

It didn't take me long to realize that more was needed, that the context was changed and so therefore I needed to undo some assumptions I'd made about the models of "bringing" in the first place. As luck would have it, just at that time I got an email from an 11th grader I'd met the year before at the national youth poetry slam festival, a kid from New Orleans named Lee. He was writing to say that he was displaced to a small town in Mississippi and that it sucked because his writing community in New Orleans had been his lifeline. It occurred to me that Lee and I might be able to help one another out. I asked him if he would send me some of his poems. I printed out those poems and took them to the classrooms where I was teaching. As I gave them to my students to read, I also told them that Lee was expecting to get poems back. He'd shared his work with the full expectation of reciprocity and they needed to send him poems that were worthy of the exchange.

The shift that happened in the workshops from that point had, I think, everything to do with the shift in the quality of the audience. Lee became the qualified audience for the writing. In order to be qualified, Lee had to meet two criteria: 1) his life and experiences were closely relatable to the lives and experiences of the writers, and 2) he was an "initiated" writer; Lee calls himself a poet, and takes his writing seriously. I had not, until that time, had both of those conditions present in our workshops. I think students felt that the demand to write back to Lee was more serious and real than anything they'd been asked to do thus far in the construct of those classrooms.

Doing this created, naturally, a demand from students and teachers that we bring Lee to Baton Rouge. And so I brought him and five other teen poets he knew from New Orleans for a three-day residency. They did a

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tour of the schools and a Sunday workshop that was packed wall to wall. The week after their visit, we had our first ever open-mic and 250 kids showed up. From that point on, because the community of writing was sparked among youth, my work was, just like in Chicago, the work of weaving and connecting. The poetry and desire to listen, in dynamic and critical exchange with one another, was always present in Baton Rouge. My work was one of discovering the conditions of participation for the youth here, and then building structures that answered those conditions- responsive structures.

THE MATHEMATICS OF GRASSROOTS PARTICIPATION

I talked earlier about grassroots organizing as relational work. I want to call this part of it the mathematics of grassroots participation; that is how six youth engaged in poetry becomes 250 youth within the week. There has to be the opportunity for those who are initiated in the art form to engage and interact, in reciprocal relations with those who could be initiated.

Louder Than a Bomb was built around this same reasoning. We knew that initially, because it was a team-only slam, we would be making a barrier for some individuals. You had to come to the festival as a team, representing some school, organization, made-up club or whatever. The team was key because we knew youth and teachers would come the first and second years and for many of them it would be their first exposure, right there in the heat of the slam, to the whole spoken word form. We knew that they would get up there reading poems on paper, hands shaking, and feeling kind of unprepared for the challenge they'd taken on. I even remember some people being mad at us that we wouldn't separate out the more experienced and the less experienced into two leagues to make it more "fair." Obviously, they'd missed the point. We were never interested in holding a competition, much less a fair one. We were interested in opening the sphere of participation and we guessed that this participation was going to be leveraged through the sites where people already had relationships, the institutions where they went to school or participated in activities in an everyday way.

And that's how it worked- we had teams in those first and second years like the team from Pedro Albizu Campos school, who seemed to barely make it to the festival, clearly nervous and unsure about what they were doing. The next year they came back solid, they'd worked at it and built a little poetry crew. By the third year, they were having try-outs, they've built a big spoken word club, they're doing open-mics and sending youth down the street to our Saturday class at YCA. That year they brought a busload of people to the festival, and it was obvious that they were initiated, that all of them knew both that it is desirable to participate and that it is possible to participate. This is how we know our work is working, because teams are building their own communities of practice that can expand outward and take on lives of their own.

I think this model of participation, one that, from its base design pushes the power to convene outward, is implicit in movement building in general, but sewn into the very structures of YSW formats specifically. I am interested primarily in furthering the ways in which we can learn how to talk about these structures and

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promote their use.

COUNTERPUBLICITY: READING THE FORMS OF CIRCULATION

One way to talk about the concept of these generative spaces is to not conceptualize them as literal spaces as such, but rather to think of them as publics. Michael Warner in his book *Publics and Counterpublics* (2005) defines a public as a “multi-contextual space of circulation, organized not by a place or an institution, but by the circulation of discourse” (p. 119). Sue Weinstein and I believe that the discourse of YSW can be further characterized as a counterpublic – this means that the basic aims of the discourse, the premise that makes it cohere, that makes it a public, is one that is fundamentally aimed at unsettling the prevailing, or dominant discourse. An analysis of the mission statements of YSW organizations and the claims made by its practitioners (documented through over 6 years of ethnographic interviews that Sue has done) supports the idea that YSW practitioners see what they are doing as shifting the very meanings of textual circulation. That is, we are questioning who gets to be a writer in the first place, and who gets to evaluate that writing, and how. This criticality is a counterpublic orientation.

One thing that I like to note about counterpublicity is that it is not about being marked by an ascribed identity, but rather about the choice that a participant makes to participate. However, Warner points out that one becomes socially marked by participation in the counterpublic (p. 121). The significance of this is a shift in the location of agency. If I have decided to become marked, to align myself with a mode of representation that will mark me as standing in tension with the prevailing discourse, that choice was mine. It was not the product of an essentialized, ascribed identity. This distinction becomes important in the process of describing who the participants in YSW counterpublics are. It would be counterproductive for YSW programs to be complicit with the ways in which participants are labeled in terms of identities put on from the outside (often labels of difference from an invisible standard of normativity) because YSW communities are formed via identities that are chosen.

The other thing that’s interesting to note about Warner’s idea of counterpublicity is that the counter part becomes the central frame through which all of the counterpublic’s texts are read. What I love about this is that it means that even when poems are not overtly and on the surface about the work of counter-narration -- poems about pancakes, kissing, and so on -- their meaning is nevertheless contextualized by the fact that they are in the counterpublic space of circulation. This means that the political meaning of a text is not entirely dependent upon its content, which is a shift from what we typically think of as a political poem. The politics are also in the form, and the spaces of circulation. For whom is the poem? What are the contexts of its creation and publicity?

Our ability to read the forms of publicity as opposed to a purely content-driven reading is significant even in the day-to-day choices we make as educators and writers. Do we believe that youth have to write about the politics of their lives in terms of political discourse? Or, can they write about the world at the registers of

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personal narrative, sensory immediacy, and the explosive re-ordering of the imagination- and we still recognize that writing as a politics?

This also provokes some rich questions about what happens to (even the most overtly political) poems when they are contextualized in the prevailing discourses spaces of circulation. Does the meaning of the revolutionary poem change when it is performed on a Nike commercial? If counter-narration is primarily about the space of circulation, then it means we need to learn to analyze the meanings and purposes of the spaces where YSW takes place- especially as the grassroots audience expands to the point of commercial attractiveness. We have to be constantly asking ourselves if there is an alignment between the purposes and aims of our work and the sphere of circulation into which YSW texts are introduced. If there is not alignment, is the representation of YSW there still one of counter-narration, or is it yet another example of the dominant discourse's ability to absorb and incorporate all that threaten its bottom line, its ultimate value expressed as commodity and capital?

ONE MIC – TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR ONE ANOTHER

One of the things people will often notice and be surprised about if it is their first time coming out to a YSW event is the way in which there is all of this noise in the room, exuberance and energy before the reading starts and between poems, when the DJ is playing and people are getting loose and shouting and dancing, but then how, and without any visible teacher-types making a scene, the room gets totally quiet when a poet comes to the mic. People seem even more surprised when someone comes to the mic and says or does something that makes them vulnerable, or that exposes them in some way that you'd think would make them the subject of ridicule, but instead they get love and validation and visible, active support. People don't think teenagers, of all people, would do this without some adults making them do it. However, when we see this what we are seeing is one of YSW's most well established norms, the norm of "respecting the mic."

Mikal Amin Lee, the program director at Urban Word NYC describes it like this, "If you need to speak your piece, you can do it here. And someone's gonna listen, and it's not just gonna be mentors." Mikal's comment reflects the permission given to articulate one's own difference from the collective, in that "you can speak your piece." He also draws attention to the importance of this norm as it is internalized by youth themselves. The implicit understanding is that a norm is only meaningful insofar as it is primarily constructed and internalized by youth. The refrains "One mic" and "Respect the mic" are repeated from all parts of the room in YSW spaces. They are signals to newcomers and affirmations from veterans that the dialogic aspects of this space are what matter, that the audience is inviting the poet, sharing responsibility for the poet's words.

One way we can see this responsibility being shared is by paying attention to the movements made from the space of the audience, onto the stage, and then back into the audience again. These are moments of high energy and interaction between performer and audience in the form of extended applause, cheering, and

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physical contact. It is common for poets stepping down from the stage to be enveloped by these mass embraces, giant pile-ups of hugging bodies. Amanda Torres, an alumnus of LTAB, remembers an early experience performing at a youth slam. She says:

I remember the first time I kicked a piece about losing my father...and walking off the stage, my whole body shaking, to be greeted by a circle of arms and elbows that embraced and validated everything that I had been through...and it just lifted me up off the ground.

I am interested in thinking about this moment of intense validation as a moment that is imbued with ritual meaning. Malidoma Somé (2010), a teacher of West African rites of passage, explains that a rite of passage involves three parts: a separation, an ordeal, and a homecoming. The separation and ordeal, he explains, are facilitated by the experiences of adolescence in Western society. However the homecoming is often missing, leaving youth in perpetual, elongated states of initiation. He says, “what people need is someone willing to create a space for them in which they can be seen, honored, and praised for what they have been through. The psyche knows when a homecoming is genuine” (Interview with Goodman, 2010, p.6).

It is interesting to think about YSW performances as enacting these three stages that Somé talks about—the poet’s movement first from the collective space of the audience and then onto the liminal space of the stage, I see this as the separation and the ordeal (the poem as the text through which the ordeal is either presented or enacted through the risk of performance itself), and then finally, the poet’s re-integration into the audience, which is a kind of homecoming, but one in which the poet’s status within the community is now altered.

The notion of home and homecoming come up with great frequency among YSW participants. The teacher Joe Ubildes tells his students in the film *To Be Heard* that, “we clap people in to let them know that they’re home” (Legiardi-Laura, R., Sultan, A., Martinez, E., & Shaffer, D., 2011). What do we make of this notion of home in YSW? I don’t think that we’re talking about home in the literal sense, but rather, an alternative conception of home, an imaginary through which it is possible to see the world, as Maxine Greene says, “as if things could be otherwise” (2001). By the time the poet returns to the audience, we have strived to transform the world we share, just a little bit more, to hold the complexity and beauty of the poem we have just heard as part of our common experience. The performance spaces of YSW, and the experience of relationships that happen between audiences and performers in those spaces, are indeed, as Joe says, ways to “to dream ourselves a world in the script of the English language.” This other-world-making is the promise and the ideal at the center of YSW practice.

WALKING THE ROAD

The promise of, and the promise made by, YSW is one of self and world transformation. Clearly, these are big claims. I believe that the energy and growth that continues to build around YSW is because of the

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investment and delivery on that promise. At the same time, I think that it is a critical time for reflection and conversation. Praxis, which Freire calls for as both reflection and action upon the world, means that we need to develop strategies for practitioners to reflect on the meanings and purposes of their work. It also means that we must do more than claim those meanings and purposes; we must also be willing to examine and analyze the outcomes of our efforts.

In doing this, we may raise a number of difficult questions about how to respond to the new opportunities and moments that we find ourselves in as a field. How do we make our purposes and values clear? How do we measure the outcomes of our work to these purposes and values? How do we guard this work from the co-optation of prevailing (largely market) interests? How does YSW grow while maintaining the counterpublic forms that we have practiced in these basement theaters and high school classrooms, spaces where a different kind of world has for so long been imagined and made at the same time? These questions, I believe, are important frames for dialogue in the years to come.

As new participants, teachers, and organizers enter the field, I extend the warmest welcome. We are here because we are struggling together, from our own contingent and localized sites of practice, to understand how to transform our world with and through the participation of youth whom we already know as brilliant writers and representatives of their own experiences. I'm encouraging you to resist the idea that we can "bring" YSW to you through bullet-pointed lists of best practices, or even the insights and ideas generated by veterans like myself. As the poet Antonio Machado wrote, "...caminante, no hay camino, se hace camino al andar" / "traveler, there is no road, the road is made by walking." What we must do is walk, and as we walk, notice constantly where the road we make is leading. Each of us must realize how to get where we are going through the particular roads, the relationships and forms that make up our own communities of practice. There is nothing magical about YSW except that one thing: people coming together on this road to ask and answer with one another.

CRITICAL REFLECTION: PART I

In the “Getting Started” section, we posted this quote by critical pedagogue Paulo Freire – “Knowledge emerges [through praxis] -- invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.” What Freire is referring to by using the word “praxis” is the conflation of theory and practice resulting in change. While action is a necessary and critical component of our work, an equally important component of the thinking about why we are doing what we are doing. The why question is situated in the theories behind our work—these theories are rooted in our thoughts, beliefs, values, and approaches to working with young people around spoken word poetry—particularly the slam.

Freire’s concept reminds us that the actions we take need to be informed actions. Our actions are guided by our values, thoughts, and beliefs. The work around critical pedagogy aims to align our actions with our theories and vice versa. This is where critical reflection comes in. Critical reflection is the process of thinking about and critically analyzing your actions with the goal of changing and improving the work you are doing. Whether you are an organizer, poet, teacher, administrator, or all of the above, studies show developing a reflective practice aids in one’s ability to generate new ideas, modify outcomes, and understand applications. Effective reflection requires you to be open-minded and to examine, question and assess the work you are doing, so as to develop your skills and knowledge. The reflection process occurs in the following three stages: (1) think about your experience, understanding and ideas, (2) reflect on what you have learned from this experience, (3) identify how this reflection will deliver outcomes and better practice, and how these will be applied. Now it is your turn!

CRITICAL REFLECTION ACTIVITY

1. Think about your experience, understanding and ideas of spoken word poetry. Reflect on what you have learned from your knowledge with youth poetry spoken word, the LTAB documentary film, or even experiences with LTAB Chicago. Write down your thoughts.

CRITICAL REFLECTION: PART I

2. Now reflect on what Kevin has written in his article *Check the Viewpoint*. Where do your theories align? Where do they differ? Write down your thoughts.

3. If you have a friend nearby, are in a poetry club, or have some other community of writers, talk through these ideas with them. Think together on how these new ideas might influence your practice. Write down your thoughts.

NEXT STEPS

Now that you have a generative knowledge of the LTAB philosophy you are ready for some action steps. Below is an outline of three action steps you can take around screening the LTAB documentary film: **Plan it, Announce it, and Screen it**. This easy-to-use outline will help you develop a team of volunteers to aid in the preparation process. The action steps information includes a one-month preparatory timeline. The body of the document provides suggestions on planning. In the margins you will find details on materials, budget, marketing ideas, and more. While these are steps that we have taken in organizing screenings, we also encourage you to explore, modify, and move forward in ways that might work better for you and your team. Please tell us about your process. We would love to make changes to our documents if you find a more efficient and effective way to work. By the time you are done with your screening you will be ready for phase two—**“Getting Ready”**.

A MONTH BEFORE THE SCREENING

ACTION STEPS

TIMELINE

This guide is organized around a suggested timeline. It is always good to plan ahead, but you can easily modify this timeline to fit your schedule and resources.

THE VISION

The screening should be held in a space that can comfortably accommodate everyone that plans to attend. The film is meant to promote discussion around spoken word poetry and the possibility of having a slam in your city. Planning to have a local spoken word artist, the filmmakers, and/or one or two poets featured in the film present at the time of the screening to host a Q&A can really add to the event.

REMEMBER

If you are planning to have guest poets at the event contact info@youngchicagoauthors.org for more information.

PURCHASE

Go to www.louderthanabombfilm.org to purchase the educational version of the documentary film. The educational version MUST be purchased in order to secure the rights to screen the film.

First, present the film screening to your organization, school, or partners. Highlight possibilities of fundraising from the event and/or collaborating with schools and other organizations that are invested in spoken word poetry, youth development, and literacy.

Forming an organizing committee to plan and execute the event is a great way to make sure people are actively planning and executing vital steps to make the event a success. Members of the organizing committee should assist with the planning, logistics and publicity for the film screening. At this point you should also consider co-sponsorship from schools, community organizations, and/or teachers and administrators. Co-sponsoring an event means that the cost of the event will be split, effectively increasing your budget and alleviating some of the stress of planning. If a school or organization does not have time to actively participate in planning the event they may be able to help identify possible funding and/or volunteers, or encourage their members to participate in the screening. Be sure to include your co-sponsors when forming your organizing committee.

It may be helpful to divide up responsibilities among your committee members. Put one group of people in charge of each of the following: budget, logistics, invitations and speakers, media and publicity.

Getting the documentary film and selecting the date(s) for the screening are really the first steps in the planning process. Look at school calendars and other organization event schedules. Make sure you pick a night that does not conflict with other events that could be of similar interest to the people that would attend the screening. The time of your event is also important. Choose a time for the event that will allow people to fit it into their schedules. Go to www.louderthanabombfilm.com to purchase the film.

BUDGET, VENUE AND LOCAL POETS/ FEATURED GUESTS

SAMPLE BUDGET

FILM	\$150
PRINTING	\$25 - \$100
ROOM RESERVATION	\$0 - \$1,000
EQUIPMENT RENTAL	\$0 - \$250
SPEAKER FEES	\$75 - \$250
TOTAL COST	\$250 - \$1,750

SUPPLEMENTING COSTS

The event does not need to be expensive to be successful. Many campuses allow students access to rooms, audiovisual equipment, and printing at no cost. Your co-sponsor or school might have a budget to assist with screening costs. Charging a small admission fee to the event or asking for a donation is also a possibility. Remember to take advantage of free resources, such as online social networking media for publicity. Be creative!

Prioritizing and advanced work will help the event come together smoothly. After purchasing the film and deciding on a date and time for the screening, begin researching possible venues.

A few things to consider when choosing a venue:

- Picking a centrally located space can attract people who may not have known about or planned on attending the event. Look for venues near parking and public transportation and that are accessible to people with disabilities.
- Consider your budget when you pick a space for your film screening. Is there a fee for renting the room? Is audio-visual equipment needed to show the film provided? If you do not have co-sponsors for the event, make sure your organization has sufficient funds to host the screening.
- Also consider your event program. How large do you expect your event to be? Is there space to comfortably fit poets and/or guest speakers? How about tables for flyers?

Add a local or featured poet to your film screening to host a Q&A. Some other folks to consider being a part of a post-screening talk-back could be LTAB's artistic director Kevin Coval, and/or the directors of the film, Jon Siskel and Greg Jacobs. Skype options can be arranged for this interaction.

Start thinking about publicity. Think about using a combination of newspapers, radio, posters, and social networking sites. Identify early on what your natural resources are and then use those means.

LOGISTICS: THREE - TWO WEEKS BEFORE THE SCREENING

LOGISTICS

EVENT SPACE

At this stage in the film screening planning it is essential to confirm a room reservation for the event. Remember the questions that were presented earlier. Also, finding an appropriate space and staying within the budget is essential for a successful screening.

AUDIO VISUAL EQUIPMENT

Most classrooms and event spaces at college and universities come equipped with audio visual equipment. If your space does not, be sure to request AV equipment well in advance.

AUDIO VISUAL EQUIPMENT LIST

- Television
 - DVD player
- Or
- Projector
 - Drop down screen
 - Guests
 - Microphone(s)

Logistics are vital in organizing a film screening and confirming that the big things are done can make the planning a lot more relaxing and fun. The most important logistics for this event are securing the space for the event and the audio visual equipment. Confirm that there will be enough tables and chairs at your venue on the day of your event if you are having local/featured poets or need a place to lay out handouts.

Also consider extending personal invitations to organizations with which you have established relationships, or that you'd like to work with in the future. This will help you maintain good relationships and extend your network for future organizing. Some of these organizations might be: the local poetry community, local colleges/universities, a local school, and any other company or institution with a like-minded mission.

Communicating with your organizing team is key to ensuring the screening runs smoothly. Check in with the committee's members to make sure they are making progress. You should also follow up with groups that you have invited to co-sponsor the event.

Send a confirmation letter/email to local/featured poets/guest(s) that have agreed to perform and/or host a Q&A at the screening. Also request a brief bio from your guests so that you can properly introduce them at the screening. After you send the confirmation letter/email if you do not hear back from your guests it is appropriate to follow up via phone: **773.486.4331**.

SOCIAL NETWORKING**TWITTER**

Twitter is a great tool for quickly spreading online word-of-mouth. Encourage your members with Twitter accounts to tweet about your event in the upcoming weeks. If you have an established Twitter page, consider live-tweeting your event using hashtags to engage people who cannot attend your event. This can also increase participation and followers for future organizing. The hashtag for this film is #louderthanabomb

FACEBOOK

Use Facebook to invite friends and classmates to your event Facebook makes it quick and easy for your guests to invite their friends and post information about your event on their profiles.

**MEDIA OUTREACH AND PUBLICITY:
THREE–TWO WEEKS BEFORE THE SCREENING**

Publicity is essential to a successful event; it is vital that people are aware of and compelled to attend. Advertising for an event does not have to be expensive if you take advantage of free and low-cost resources and social networking sites. The best way to promote your event is through word of mouth. Talk about the screening with potential partners, young people, students, friends, and spoken word artists at other organizations' events.

Consider putting an advertisement in your school/organizations newsletter. A small notice may make people aware of the film and the possibility of having a LTAB slam in your city. If your school/organization has a blog or website, be sure to post announcements there.

Many schools/organizations maintain a weekly calendar or send out a daily or weekly e-mail of events—make sure your event gets added to these mailings. Add your event to relevant email listservs, including student groups, related organizations, and community organizations mailings.

Flyers are a great way to catch people's attention. It is essential to finalize the flyers for printing this week so that they can be hung in designated areas. It might be a good idea to print handouts for the event when the flyers are printed so that it is all done at the same time. Be sure to check if school/organizations have regulations on where you may post flyers to avoid having them taken down.

Encourage other schools and partner organizations to invite people.

Writing with chalk on sidewalks or high traffic areas around your schools can get your event attention. People notice unusual and oddly placed advertising.

FINAL DETAILS: ONE WEEK BEFORE THE SCREENING

SAMPLE PROGRAM

WELCOME/INTRODUCTION	5 MINUTES
FILM PRESENTATION	90 MINUTES
GUEST POET(S) PERFORMANCE	5-10 MINUTES
Q&A SESSION	20-25 MINUTES
CLOSING COMMENTS	5 MINUTES
NETWORKING	15 MINUTES
LENGTH OF SCREENING	2.5 HOURS

MEDIA OUTREACH

Confirm that all of the media for the event has been handled. Hang flyers and send out newsletter articles or email blasts appropriately. Create a Facebook event and invite as many people as possible.

DEVELOP AN EVENT PROGRAM

It is important to know how the program is going to run and in what order things are going to happen to execute a smooth and successful screening. Write out a schedule for your volunteers and attendees to follow.

FINALIZE LOGISTICS

Verify that all arrangements for location and AV equipment are settled. The organizing Committee should assign tasks to volunteers to make sure the event goes according to plan.

ASSIGN VOLUNTEERS TO.....

- Set-up table(s), lay out flyers and sign-up sheets.
- Be in charge of the AV equipment. This person should plan to go to the space early and confirm that everything is working properly.
- Assist the guest(s) throughout the event and inform them of the schedule.
- Operate the lights throughout the event.
- Greet guests as they arrive.
- Introduce the film and the guest speaker(s).
- Capture guests' names and e-mails to inform them about future participation.

REMINDER

Send a reminder message on Facebook or via e-mail the day of the event. Have your members discuss the event throughout the day to entice people to come and hear about the issues being discussed in the film.

FOLLOW UP

- Send thank you letters or e-mails to co-sponsors
- Send thank you emails to guests who attended the event and signed up for email updates. This is a great opportunity to invite them to future meetings.
- Forward copies of your sign-up sheets to Young Chicago Authors at info@youngchicagoauthors.org so that your members and guests can be invited to Louder Than a Bomb events.

SET-UP

Have members of your organization go to the event venue about a half hour before the event starts. Be sure your volunteers know their assigned tasks.

Set-up chairs and tables. One or two tables should contain a sign-up sheet and informational handouts. These should be located near the entrance so guests can sign up as they enter. You may need another table for refreshments after the event. If you are hosting local/feature poets or other guests, be sure you have enough chairs.

The person in charge of the AV equipment should have the equipment tested and working by the time people start to arrive. It is also nice to have the film cued up so that the event can begin on time.

Know where the bathrooms are so people can be easily directed. The guest artist/speakers should be instructed to arrive before the event begins so they have time to take in the space and prepare themselves to perform and host the Q&A. It is also good to provide the presenters with water before they begin their performance and discussion.

Once all the tasks that have been completed and the guests start to arrive it is important to be professional and follow the event program that has already been established.

Enjoy the event and be flexible: some parts of the program may take longer or less time than anticipated but being natural and moving along with the plan will ensure a fun event that runs smoothly.

GETTING READY TO GET READY

- _____ Generative knowledge about the Louder Than a Bomb philosophy.
- _____ Completed Critical Reflection Part I.
- _____ Connected with Young Chicago Authors to have further discussion about Louder Than a Bomb.
- _____ Connected with a team of organizers.
- _____ Planned, Announced, and Screened the film.
- _____ Sent out follow-up emails to interested participants.
- _____ Ready to Be Ready.

GETTING READY

After developing a generative understanding about the LTAB philosophy— and critically reflecting on your own viewpoint(s) -- you are ready to “Get Ready”. Two key components make up this section of the toolbox: first is knowledge generation about the LTAB methodology and second is preparation for an immersive, on-the-ground community organizing experience. As you read through materials you will learn about the methods employed to organize LTAB as well as how to build strategic partners. By the end of the section you will be able to say - Get ready!

The LTAB methodology is about integration-- an assimilation that comes from intentional community organizing—the results of which engender new cultural literacies and growth in personal agency. – Anna Festa

Did you know the LTAB methodology is not based on the poetry slam or even the poetry?! You might have already guessed it, but if not, our methods are rooted in intentional community organizing. Intentional community organizing for LTAB encompasses action which seeks to engage multiple publics from all neighborhoods of a city who have a vested interest in the writing and performance of poetry. As you will see, the organizing starts in the context of our schools. The vehicle of slam brings together neighborhood schools from throughout the city. The slam provides public platform(s) for young people to both share and listen to authentic youth stories! In this section of the toolbox we outline the why and how of our methodology.

WHY

Intentional community organizing is at the heart of the LTAB methodology. LTAB believes in putting the art, culture and tools of the telling of stories into the hands of young citizens. When our young people can tell and re-tell their histories in context of public platforms, they are able to imagine and re-imagine their individual and collective identities, and become culturally grounded in their own experiences. LTAB believes the voices of young people have the capacity to impact our schools and further induce a city's cultural vitality by provoking a fresh understanding of the place(s) we call home. Through the listening to and telling of authentic stories, participants in LTAB – both performers and audience members—gain polycultural understandings of one's city that can result in new empathies for difference among its members. The LTAB methodology asks the question – Can the performance of spoken word poetry aid in the grasping of new cultural literacies and broaden our appreciation of multiple publics?

HOW

The LTAB methodology does not start with the youth poetry festival. The slam becomes the culminating event of all the work done year-round as an organizer. The LTAB methodology is a progressive program of polycultural engagements focused on cultural literacies. The framework is built around three levels of engagement: Level 1 - the individual's engagement, Level 2- engage the idea of community as writers, and Level 3 - organizational engagement and building a core community of young authors. Below is an explanation of each level and an outline of how each form of engagement is put into action. While these engagements can come in a variety of different forms, here we illustrate them around the organization and implementation of an in-school spoken word poetry workshop/club. The information should help you generate ideas of what the LTAB methodology will look like when you apply it as an organizer.

A level 1 individual engagement represents a short-term encounter with young people. When a level 1 engagement is put into action in an in-school context it takes the form of a one-time lesson plan or

workshop with the purpose of engaging the self as a writer. In a workshop, LTAB aims to create an accurate, authentic representation of self in the context of a critical and public pedagogy. By rooting the workshop on the life and lived experiences of the young person, LTAB places the student at the center of the learning experience. Five keys to engaging a young person in the context of a workshop are: (1) WATCH: both students and teachers experience a culturally relevant critically engaging form of writing or performance; this can be selected by the students or teachers, (2) DISCUSS: Students and teachers engage in decoding/encoding the language used to create the materials shown through an educator-facilitated discussion, (3) EXPLORE: students and teachers identify poetic techniques used in the materials introduced and bridges are made between language arts and popular culture, connecting the learning with the everyday lives of the students, (4) WRITE: the teachers guides the writing process through a writing prompt, and (5) SHARE: students and teachers engage one another by performing and listening to each other's poetry, and the teacher publicly honors the students strengths. A level 1 engagement can be delivered in the context of any single or short term workshops, assemblies, performances, and professional development training session with teachers and artist educators.

A level 2 engagement moves away from the individual as a writer and engages the individuals as a community of authors. As a community, their writings are a valuable and powerful act and a tool with which to build and galvanize a group of people. When a level 2 engagement is put into action in an in-school context it takes the form of an on-going spoken word poetry club. Here the aim of the poetry club is both to collectively write and to publicly share the work. In a poetry club, level 1 is repeated and level 2 is added into the mix with the introduction of the concept of audience and performance changing part five of the engagement. Five keys to engaging at level 2 are: (1) WATCH (2) DISCUSS (3) EXPLORE, (4) WRITE, (5) SHARE: the scope of the sharing expands beyond the club itself and the work is communicated in front of an audience at a small-scale event, through a publication, or by posting materials online. A level 2 engagement can represent any long-term residency and/or partnership with educational institutions.

A level 3 engagement is rooted in building a core community of youth authors. When a level 3 engagement is put into action in the context of an in-school poetry club, the aim becomes honing both voice and craft of the writers with the help of local teaching artists on a year-round basis and performing on a city-wide public platform. In a year-round poetry club, levels 1 and 2 are modified and employed in addition to level 3. Five keys to engaging at a level 3 level are: (1) WATCH: both students and teachers experience a culturally relevant critically engaging form of writing or performance performed by a local poet(s), (2) DISCUSS: students, teachers, and poet(s) engage in decoding/encoding the language used to create the materials through discussion, (3) EXPLORE: students, teachers, and poet(s) identify poetic techniques used in the materials introduced and bridges are made between language arts and popular culture, connecting the learning with the everyday lives of the students, (4) WRITE: the poet guides the writing process through a writing prompt and work together with the poet(s) to refine what is written and the way it is performed, (5) SHARE: students, teachers, and poet(s) share their writing at the center of public discourse through a citywide recognized public platform. A level 3 engagement can be any form of long-term mentorship of young writers by not only their classroom teachers, but also local poets and professional teaching artists.

WHY & HOW

This engagement allows the students the time and resources to make the shift from the process of writing and performing poetry to becoming spoken word poetry artists. This level of engagement provides ongoing public platforms for students to share their work throughout the city in a variety of venues.

NEXT STEPS: PART I

How does the work of intentional community organizing fit into the contexts of these progressive levels of engagement? Take a look at how Kent Martin, the organizer from Tulsa, Oklahoma – LTAB’s first pilot site—puts this methodology into action. You will notice that the means of his organizing are based off of available resources and natural partners. You will also be able to see how he targets key stakeholders and builds allies early on. As you read through his story, pay special attention to the ways he plans his initial and on-going engagements with key stakeholders, takes action by using the LTAB documentary film as a rallying tool, observes the progress he and his team make throughout the process, thinks critically about his role as an organizer, and learns new best practices by reflecting on methods and outcomes of the organizing.

ORGANIZING TULSA *BY KENT MARTIN*

“LTAB Tulsa was born out of limited resources and a step-by-step strategy for growth. Do not count out the resources of a university.” - Kent Martin, Organizer of LTAB Tulsa

My name is Kent Martin and I am a graduate student in Human Relations at the University of Oklahoma - Tulsa. After years of work in the theater, media production and marketing, I had an existential crisis. I felt as if I had increasingly served to move product that only fueled mindless escapism and isolation, and I craved work that strengthened community. Ultimately, I was looking for meaning and a way to make a positive contribution to the world. For me, my Human Relations graduate program gave me the space and guidance I needed to figure out a new direction. The Human Relations program was designed by Dr. George Henderson, the third African-American appointed to a full-time faculty position at OU, in response to racial tensions which reached a boiling point in Oklahoma in the late 1960's. Strongly influenced by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Saul D. Alinsky, Henderson became a remarkable scholar and leader on OU's campus. He guided the African-American Student Union into a position of weight at the University, resulting in positive institutional changes. Eventually he was asked to create the Human Relations program. As he designed it, the program would train professionals towards becoming change agents. It would prepare activists for advocacy work in organizations that prevented or abated discrimination - encompassing issues pertaining to race, gender, orientation, national origin, disability, and age. Today, its students may also study counseling and organizational studies. The program is unique in that it combines traditional theoretical classes with experiential work in their city. A student is required to work in their community for internship credit hours. This requirement is what set the stage for me to discover and eventually work with Louder Than a Bomb. Though Human Relations led me to work on this project, any social service program should have student-centered academic work connecting learning to neighborhood development and place-making activities, which is entirely complementary to Louder Than a Bomb.

While mulling over potential arts related internship projects, a friend sent me a link to the trailer for the documentary “Louder Than a Bomb,” which was, at that point, making the rounds at various film festivals with positive buzz. The trailer tells an affecting, concise story about students from a variety of backgrounds tapping into their elemental creativity, writing, performing, coming together and forming unlikely relationships amid a flurry of embraces; after hearing one of its participating students, Adam Gottlieb, say in the trailer's voice over: “Writing a poem does not change the world. Learning about new people and understanding new people and really feeling inspired by people who are very different than you...I would like to say that's changing the world, and if not, then it's definitely coming much, much closer,” it was clear that Young Chicago Authors / Louder Than a Bomb achieves great things. Like a lot of sizeable cities, Tulsa has had an existing and active spoken word scene for many years. Yet it still lacked a unifying model that engaged the community as a whole - particularly when it came to the city's youth. I imagined what it would be like if the spirit of Louder Than a Bomb was brought to Tulsa.

Can you imagine Tulsa, Oklahoma as the historic site of one our nation's most deadly and destructive race riots—today a distressingly segregated city in a redder-than-red state? ABSOLUTELY! This is my account

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of starting an LTAB in Tulsa and my advice from the road. Though I hasten to add that I am learning new best practices every day! Even so, I hope you will glean some useful information here.

My work on LTAB-Tulsa started with a phone call to Jon Siskel, co-producer/director of the LTAB documentary. He was very encouraging and gave me an idea of costs associated with bringing the film and Chicago poets to Tulsa. Jon introduced me to Young Chicago Authors Artistic Director and LTAB Co-Founder Kevin Coval, who promptly became an invaluable mentor. Kevin sent me curriculum from YCA/LTAB, and it has been very useful in orienting local educators ever since. I should mention here that at first I felt a bit out of place as an organizer since I am not a poet. To get beyond that feeling, it took Kevin's assurance that I too had a welcome role in working with Louder Than a Bomb. As it happens, arts administration skills are just as valuable in this work. Naturally it helps for one to be a writer or have experience with this art form, but you don't have to be a poet hitting open mics all the time, no matter what anyone tells you. Though you probably should expect to be prodded in front of a microphone at some point; it pretty much goes with the territory. As I have learned, an LTAB organizer should start with an eagerness to learn about the philosophy and culture of LTAB, its curriculum, and the history and culture of his/her own city. If you have a passion for seeing your community come together in a meaningful way – then you should do this. Take it from me and save yourself whatever worry you might have on this scale! Like any startup, an organizer's early efforts are concerned with marshaling support, building bridges, and raising funds. Echoing Anna's words above, this work "should be based off of available resources and natural partnerships within one's community."

Though an LTAB organizer may be housed in and serve an incubating institution, he/she is ultimately an intermediary resource broker for an intermediary organization (LTAB); because, in due course, the goal is to have it embraced by your whole community. One may move between high schools, middle schools, universities, non-profit agencies, businesses, and natural helping and support systems (youth, parents, neighborhood leaders) in order to bring in untapped resources.

With partnerships and relationships, there is almost always reciprocity involved. So it is endemic to the organizer to seek out entities with overlapping interests; to make sure that all entities understand the incentives of the other, and that expectations are fulfilled. Therefore, one should use caution in choosing partnering stakeholders. This includes relationships with artist-educators and coaches. An organizer should expect to provide a level of support towards the benefit of its stakeholders.

I am an advocate for the University as an excellent home base for getting an LTAB started; but one may find any number of institutions willing to champion the project. Such an institution will provide an organizer with initial credibility and inroads to funding. LTAB should be an attractive project for many Universities. They are well positioned to assist community schools. Most Universities should be concerned with community engagement, they should want prospective students on their campus, and LTAB can provide a great launching pad for research projects and internship work.

College and graduate students have (or should have) platforms and resources available for them on their

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campuses. Not to mention the life-support infrastructure that allows time for organizers to work on launching the project full-force sans income. In my case, as an active student association officer, I was able to approach my group for seed funds out of our student activity budget. With my fellow students' support I was then able to get an appointment with the campus's uppermost administration to ask for their direction in funding leads and general guidance. Using the film, or its trailer, as an overall introduction to the project is an effective way to orient any group you are presenting to. It is also advisable to have a preliminary budget in which you can build upon later. In our case, we aimed to raise a total of around \$6,000 to bring the film to Tulsa, along with some Chicago educators. We also needed to accommodate four public schools during prelims and Finals. (We ultimately ended up raising over \$13,000 for our pilot program! This allowed our students to travel to Chicago as their competition prize. The travel exchange component will always be about half of your budget). Though considering the Chicago origins, not much is needed for an organizer to create a "Louder Than a Bomb-Wherever" beyond YCA approval, a venue, some volunteers, the right preparation, a high tolerance for many different kinds of people, and a lot of persistence. If budget issues seem too daunting, don't let them be - YCA staff will be an excellent advising source (on this and many other matters). Remember that YCA is your parent organization and soak up as much guidance and influence as you can from them.

In declaring this project as my graduate program internship focus, I gained the support of my University's faculty and administration. I was provided with an accessible central-hub office within the university to serve the mission of the institution, LTAB, and the partnering community stakeholders. I was also able to use the University's facilities for all of our first year events free of charge. We started with a 'top-down' approach in order to gain support from our public school system. First, with University referrals getting me in the door, I pitched the project to the Associate Superintendent of Tulsa Public Schools and showed him the LTAB documentary trailer. This was all it took to achieve the highest possible backing. Second, we invited our target high school principals to a private screening of the entire Louder Than a Bomb documentary – which won them over fully. This proved to be a successful strategy, as the principals in turn used their positions to help me find the appropriate high school poetry club / team coaches that were key in student recruitment. Even with that kind of support, it still took (and continues to take) a lot of emailing, phoning and school visitation to maintain interest and progress. We can assume that on average, high school teachers are overworked and underpaid, and they need our support and persistence. Again, we started with four of our schools representing the most diverse neighborhoods possible. Our first year's goal was to introduce the concept of performance poetry and slam into the high schools and community. We did this by 1) pre-screening the documentary for interested students at our selected schools, 2) narrowing down teams during preliminary rounds, 3) marketing and planning for subsequent community screenings of the documentary with local educators, Jon Siskel, Kevin Coval, and Nate Marshall in attendance, 4) organizing a writing and performing workshop taught by Kevin and Nate and 5) having our final slam hosted by Kevin and Nate. This was all accompanied by as much media coverage as we could muster. Our first year's finals competition was one of the most rewarding experiences I have ever had. This is not to say that it was without mistakes and gaffes. But our students were wonderful (as yours will no doubt be). Our

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audience loved it, and the feeling of potential and excitement was palpable. It was also documented. Photo and video documentation of all events is imperative for external sponsorship efforts in subsequent seasons.

When our pilot program was complete, there was never a question that we had to keep it going. I learned that it was critical to ramp up the curriculum of the program in advance of the second year cycle to increase interest and caliber of student work. We built six Saturday morning writing workshops into the second year budget. The workshops also served as ‘auditions’ in finding the most outstanding and simpatico artist-educators. We followed up these workshops with school visitations to keep everyone engaged and on-point. The educators (including young LTAB-Tulsa alums) have become essential team members as the organization has grown. They have helped to strengthen the work of the school coaches. Pounding the pavement with proposals, writing samples, photos and video in hand, LTAB-Tulsa was able to acquire added corporate and foundation sponsorship for year two. This time we set our budgetary target at \$20,000. With good buzz from year-one we were able to (more than) double our school participation – as much as our budget and infrastructure would allow. Incremental growth is necessary to sustain the project and keep it manageable. Our second year goal was to increase community partnerships and buy-in. We also started an online community with a Facebook page and polished our logo and related imagery.

Of course it hasn’t always been easy. Dear organizer, know that there are going to be setbacks, sleepless nights, and as the saying goes, ‘there is always someone to ‘rain on your parade.’” Especially with a project this wide ranging; any work that ushers real change, and has this kind of impact will have its share of naysayers (‘haters’ as our students often say). If your work is successful, they will magically appear. As an organizer working in the unfortunate reality of limited resources, you will have to deal with territorialism, encroachers, and conflicts - especially in the beginning stages of your program. Here is what I can offer: deal with all of that in the most mature way you can manage. It helps enormously to never lose sight of the mission of Louder Than a Bomb by keeping your focus on the students. Find your core group of trustworthy allies and lean on them when you can. If you can’t win the haters over, then politely cut ties and don’t look back. Also, school participation will oscillate as circumstances change for teachers and students. You can only do what you can to support them. Try to be mindful of your own well-being. Here is how you can continuously remind yourself the work you are doing is worth it; it’s a guaranteed, no-fail antidote. All you have to do is sit in a room with your students as they write down their stories and courageously share them with each other. Another reason to build your curriculum! You will laugh, cry, relate and generally be inspired. Sometimes revival comes from an unexpected moment, let’s say when a student falls short of their personal expectations at the mic during competition, and you see them dig in, find inner resolve, and tell you that they are going to do better next time. How can you not feel re-charged to do whatever it takes to ensure that there is a next time?

When I asked the director of the foundation that is a primary sponsor for LTAB-Tulsa what an organizer might do if they were not affiliated with a University or an otherwise supportive institution, she told me that a person should look into local foundations and businesses that have a focus on education. Also look into local arts and humanities councils, community centers and related creative writing centers housed within

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Universities. You are bound to find the right organization to help you get going. Remember that the documentary film is a great tool to help you obtain support.

Throughout my travels, YCA mentors and local educators have generously advised me on the logistics of LTAB slam related activities. Nurture these relationships. Make sure to get a copy of YCA's official LTAB rules and regulations which can be downloaded from their website. Use that document to design one that fits the size and scope of your competition. The slam competition will be very effective in engaging your students, but never forget the spirit that infuses the LTAB mantra, "The point is not the point. The point is the poetry." You will understand why this is so important as you continue to work with your students.

CRITICAL REFLECTION: PART II

An organizer should have an eagerness to learn about the philosophy and culture of LTAB, its curriculum, and the history and culture of his/her own city. – Kent Martin, Organizer of LTAB Tulsa

In his narrative, Kent discusses his process of organizing LTAB Tulsa. He outlines his methodologies of planning, taking action, thinking about, observing, and reflecting up his work. Some of the key questions he asked himself about his practice were: who lives in my city, what is my personal stake in organizing LTAB Tulsa, how do I imagine LTAB Tulsa will look, where do I anticipate gaining support, and what are my hopes and fears about LTAB?

To continue working on Freire’s notions of praxis, let’s once again take some time to critically reflect on the LTAB methodology as YCA has framed it and as Kent outlined in his narrative.

CRITICAL REFLECTION ACTIVITY

1. Consider how Kent’s organizing took on a reflective practice. How did his experiences, understanding and ideas help him learn from his organizing? What new knowledge(s) did Kent gain throughout his process of organizing? How did he apply the things he learned because of reflection? Write down your thoughts.

2. Consider your own experience, understanding and ideas of intentional community organizing. Reflect on what you have learned from your experiences thus far. Write down your thoughts.

CRITICAL REFLECTION: PART II

3. Now think about both your ideas and YCA/Kent's ideas around methodology. Where do your theories align? Where do they differ? Write down your thoughts.

4. If you have a friend nearby, are in a poetry club, or have some other source of community of writer, talk through these ideas with them. Think together on how these new ideas might influence your own methodologies. Write down your thoughts.

NEXT STEPS: PART II

Now that you have gained a generative knowledge about the LTAB methodology through the levels of engagement framework, Kent's narrative, and the critical reflection exercise, you are ready for some action steps. The methodology section is at the center of the toolkit because the work you do here is about organizing your core group of teaching artists, poets, students, teachers, administration, basically all your key stakeholders. These allies are the metaphorical backbone of the work that will sustain LTAB in your city. Therefore the focus of your action steps is based on organizing a stakeholder meeting(s).

You probably have a good idea who your stakeholders might be based on the interest generated through the Louder Than a Bomb film screening. These folks will now be ready to learn more about how to get involved and support LTAB. You are ready to host the organizers meeting!

Below is an outline of five key action steps to take to prepare for the meeting: **Plan It, Think about It, Announce It, Host it, and Evaluate It.** The goals of the meeting are providing a space for your allies to envision how they might champion the youth poetry festival, gaining commitment(s) for service, and to gain financial support to host the LTAB professional development training. Once you establish commitments from your stakeholders you will be **"Ready!"**

A MONTH BEFORE THE STAKEHOLDERS MEETING

ACTION STEPS

TIMELINE

This guide is organized around a suggested timeline. It is always good to plan ahead, but you can easily modify this timeline to fit your schedule and resources.

THE VISION

The meeting should be held in a space that can comfortably accommodate everyone that plans to attend. The meeting is meant to galvanize support and commitments from stakeholders. Planning to have representatives from school administrations, teachers, spoken word poets, and co-sponsors will help to round out the conversation and keep things interesting.

REMEMBER

Your goal is to connect with natural partners and available resources. This meeting is not about gaining commitments from people you need to do a lot of persuading in order to stimulate involvement. Use the sign-up sheet from the film screening to target interested audiences.

First, announce the need to plan a stakeholders meeting to your organizing committee. The organizing committee members are the folks who helped you execute the film screening. Members of the organizing committee should assist with researching, planning and preparing logistics for the meeting.

To get started, divide up the preparation and responsibilities amongst the organizing committee. Put one person or group in charge of the research, another planning, and one more responsible for the logistics. The research committee will focus on mapping out your city by getting familiar with its history, arts and culture, and local school system. The planning committee will find a space to meet, email and contact stakeholders. The logistics committee will prepare an agenda, create a Power Point, and start a contact list. Dividing up tasks is great way to make sure people are actively involved and feel like they have a sense of ownership. While these groups have different responsibilities, the work of each committee relates to and is reliant upon the other groups. As a facilitator, you will want to be sure your groups stay in communication.

Selecting the date(s) for the meeting and creating a map of your city are really the first steps in the planning process. Look at school calendars and other organization event schedules. Make sure you pick a day/night that does not conflict with other events that could be of similar interest to the people that would attend the meeting. Choose a time for the event that will allow people to fit it into their schedules. Finally, use the following outline to help to create your map. The map will come in handy at your meeting.

HISTORY, ARTS AND CULTURE, SCHOOLS

SAMPLE MAP INFORMATION

# OF SCHOOLS	56
# OF DISTRICTS	4
# OF LOCAL UNIVERSITIES	4
POPULATION	525,000
DEMOGRAPHICS	50 % CAUCASIAN
	30% AFRICAN AMERICAN
	10% LATIN AMERICAN
	5 % ASIAN AMERICAN
	5% OTHER
# OF YOUTH LITERACY ORGANIZATIONS	6
# OF LOCAL VENUES	3
# OF LITERARY TEACHING ARTISTS/POETS WORKING IN SCHOOLS	12
# OF ONGOING LOCAL POETRY EVENTS	3

MAKING YOUR MAP

Be creative!

Use Google Maps. Take a screen shoot and add place markers on the map to indicate your findings.

Use Google Image Search and find a map of your city. Write your findings below it in a key.

Ask an artistically inclined committee member to hand draw a map. Include the research on the back of the drawing.

Present the map at the stakeholders meeting.

After setting a date and time for the meeting, begin researching your city. Making a map of your city will help you target key stakeholders and expand your vision for who is involved at both a sponsorship and artistic level. The map can be visual, digital, or a written summary of your findings. The goal of this exercise is intentional community organizing.

Here are few ways to learn more about your city’s history, arts and culture:

- Go to your local library and talk to a reference librarian. They will most likely have microfilm records of old newspapers – articles, ads, photos, etc.
- Contact your local or county historical society.
- Pay a visit to your history museum.
- Seek out longtime residents and conduct an oral history.
- Plan a visit to your local university and speak with a historian.
- Use the internet and “Google” the name of your city. You’ll find plenty.

Here are several ways to gain an understanding of your local school system:

- Connect with a local school teacher.
- Visit your alma mater and talk to your former teachers and school principal.
- Plan a visit to the district office and talk with a superintendent.
- Do research online about demographics – Check out this site: National Center for Education Statistics.
- Inquire about sitting in on a PTA meeting—PTA is not only for parents of students.

Conversations with people are the key to successful research. As your team engages in this study, make sure they communicate the vision of starting a youth poetry festival. This will help the folks you are talking to be more specific with the information they provide. Also, you never know, some of these people might be interested in participating in your work.

LOGISTICS: THREE - TWO WEEKS BEFORE THE MEETING

ACTION STEPS

CONTACT LIST

Meet with your planning committee and go over all the names of potential stakeholders. Add to the list based on new information gathered by the research team. Get a head count of potential participants.

MEETING SPACE

Confirm a room reservation for the gathering. Find an appropriate space that will fit comfortably the projected number of participants and book a meeting space accordingly.

AUDIO VISUAL EQUIPMENT

Most classrooms and event spaces at college and universities come equipped with audio visual equipment. If your space does not, be sure to request AV equipment well in advance.

AUDIO VISUAL EQUIPMENT LIST

- Projector
- Drop down screen

The most important logistics for this meeting are contacting all possible stakeholders, securing a space, and making sure you have all the necessary materials/information to host a stimulating gathering.

At this point you will want to check in with your organizing team to make sure they are making progress on their tasks. Ongoing communication with them is crucial for maintaining a sense of team in the organizing process. You should follow up with each committee: research, planning, and logistics.

The research team will be half way done with their project. Upon checking in with them, ask who they have made connections with. This information will need to be given to the planning committee.

The planning committee will have put together a list of stakeholders with their contact information. Provide them with any additional stakeholder information and get a head count.

The logistics committee will need to book a meeting space based on the projected number of participants. Confirm with the meeting space that there will be enough tables and chairs at the space on the day of your meeting and if you are using AV equipment and Power Point, be sure they have a projector/screen and proper adaptors for your computer.

FACE-TO-FACE AND MEDIA OUTREACH**SOCIAL NETWORKING****TWITTER**

Tweet about the meeting to remind stakeholders to attend and encourage your members with Twitter accounts to also announce the meeting. This will help make sure you are not leaving anyone out of the mix who might want to participate in organizing LTAB.

FACEBOOK

Use Facebook to invite stakeholders to the meeting. You probably already have followers because of the screening. Managing your Facebook page will help to maintain the buzz around the festival planning. This will also aid in keeping your organizing work transparent.

The best way to announce the meeting is through word of mouth. Use the contacts made by your research team and the sign-up sheet/connections made at the screening to re-connect with your stakeholders. Talk about the meeting with potential partners at other organizations' events, during the time of your research, and whenever you run into them. Make it a priority to have three moments of contact with your stakeholders: face-to-face, phone, and/or email.

Before sending out an email announcing the meeting, call or meet with the stakeholder face-to-face. Let them know your vision for LTAB and ask them if they are interested in learning more about the festival. Let them know that you will be hosting a stakeholders meeting. Ask them if you could send them an email about it.

Have your planning committee put together an email announcing the meeting. Be sure to include the following information:

- Date/time
- Location
- Agenda/goal(s) for the meeting: it is a best practice to provide the agenda to your stakeholders at least a week before the meeting as it helps to get them thinking about how they might participate before the day of the meeting.
- If you are providing snacks, let them know.
- Contact information of the member of the planning committee to field questions.
- Set a date for them to reply and confirm their attendance.
- Thank them.
- Send a follow-up email to confirm their attendance.

ONE WEEK BEFORE THE MEETING

SAMPLE AGENDA

WELCOME	10 MINUTES
SHOW TRAILER/DISCUSS VISION	10 MINUTES
REVIEW AGENDA	5 MINUTES
POWERPOINT PRESENTATION	20-25 MINUTES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ABOUT YOUR CITY, ARTS AND CULTURE, SCHOOLS • WHY AND HOW LTAB • TIMELINE • NEEDS • GETTING INVOLVED/MAKING COMMITMENTS 	
QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION	20-25 MINUTES
CLOSING COMMENTS	5 MINUTES
NETWORKING	15 MINUTES
LENGTH OF MEETING	1.5 HOURS

REVIEW THE AGENDA

It is important to know how the meeting is going to run and in what order things are going to happen to execute a smooth and successful gathering. Assign tasks for the meeting beforehand and make sure you are all on the same page.

FINALIZE LOGISTICS

Verify that all arrangements for location and AV equipment are settled. Send out a reminder email to your stakeholders and confirm attendance.

ASSIGN MEMBERS TO:

- Purchase snacks, large construction paper if you are going to do some writing.
- Set-up table(s), print enough agendas for each participant, and lay out them out.
- Be in charge of the AV equipment. This person should plan to go to the space early and confirm that everything is working properly.
- Create a sign-up sheet which designated jobs for people to volunteer for: funding professional development by LTAB Chicago teaching artists, housing LTAB Chicago poets, hosting LTAB Chicago poets at their school, starting a slam team, hosting a slam, teaching poetry, donations, etc.
- Greet stakeholders as they arrive.
- Create a power point.
- Make one person the facilitator of the meeting. This person should be able to summarize/clarify points that are being made, facilitate discussion, and keep everyone on task.
- Assign a note taker to keep meeting minutes.
- Confirm guests' names, e-mails, and contact information.

THE DAY OF THE MEETING**REMINDER**

Send a reminder message on Facebook or via e-mail the day of the meeting.

DURING THE MEETING

Do not try to fit everything into one meeting. It is better to end on time and schedule a second meeting to address unanswered questions and discuss commitment levels and involvement, than to go over time.

FOLLOW UP

- Send thank you letters or e-mails to stakeholders and include personal notes about how they have committed to participate and a timeline of next steps.
- If they promised a donation, be sure to let them know how to go about processing their gift.
- If you needed to schedule a second meeting, send out a confirmation email that lists date and time. It is a best practice to structure the follow up meeting in a similar fashion as the first.

SET-UP

Have committee members go to the meeting space about a half hour before it starts. Be sure your members know their assigned tasks.

Set up chairs and tables and lay out agendas. The person in charge of the AV equipment should have the equipment tested and working by the time people start to arrive. It is also nice to have the trailer and power point cued up so you can begin the meeting on time. Set up snack and refreshments.

Know where the bathrooms are so people can be easily directed. Have a brief meeting with all committee members before the meeting starts to go over agenda and talk through any questions they may have.

Once all the tasks that have been completed and the stakeholders start to arrive it is important to be professional and follow the agenda that has already been established.

Enjoy the meeting and be flexible: some parts of the meeting may take longer or less time than anticipated but being natural and moving along with the plan will ensure a conversational environment. Make sure you allow enough time for a Q&A. This will be the time for you to help facilitate how stakeholders can be involved- use the sign-up sheet to guide this discussion.

At the end of the meeting, take some time to do closing comments. Designate a place to put the sign-up sheet outside of the meeting space. This will give you an opportunity to clean up as people are mingling. Finally, let the stakeholders know that committee members will be available to talk more about opportunities and answer questions.

NEXT STEPS AFTER THE MEETING

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Having master teachers and teaching artists conduct on-the-ground professional development is essential for both events leading up to the festival and the festival itself.

Professional development will take between 2 – 3 days and includes in-school performances, a workshop series, on-the-ground training during the festival, and a debriefing session.

See appendix on page 84 – 85 for specific details on the professional development training.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CHICAGO

Young Chicago Authors hosts two annual workshops for teaching artists, students, and organizers: one in the summer and one during the time of the festival. Check out their website for upcoming events and workshops: www.youngchicagoauthors.org.

DEBRIEFING

After the stakeholders meeting, you will want to host a short debriefing session. The meeting can be directly after the stakeholders meeting or soon thereafter. The debriefing session will help your team critically reflect on what transpired in the meeting in order to thoughtfully plan next steps.

If you plan on having this meeting on the same day, allow for a short break to regroup prior to gathering. If you decide to meet on another day, select the day before everyone leaves and send a follow up email reminding committee members of the date, time and location.

Select one person to facilitate the discussion. Have them work with the note-taker from the meeting to review and recap the conversations among stakeholders. Talk about what went well and what needs improvement. Which stakeholders made commitments to support the work? Which stakeholders are on the fence, and which ones are not interested in extending help at this time?

Second, focus on the committee members. Make sure they feel energized by work they are doing. If not, ask the members how they would like to support the work instead.

Third, connect with Young Chicago Authors and let them know about your progress. The next phase of the planning – hosting the festival-- focuses on collaboration between your team and LTAB Chicago Master Teachers. Here LTAB Chicago poets will join you and your team for the week of the festival to conduct programming and serve as hosts at the slam. This one-time immersive training will prepare you to run the festival for years to come. Contact **Young Chicago Authors at: 773.486.4331 or info@youngchicagoauthors.org** for more information.

GETTING READY

- ___ Generative knowledge about the Louder Than a Bomb methodology.
- ___ Completed Critical Reflection Part II
- ___ Researched your City's history, arts, culture, and schools.
- ___ Created a map of your City to help with intentional community organizing.
- ___ Planned, Thought about, Announced, Hosted, and Evaluated your Stakeholder meeting.
- ___ Sent out follow-up emails to Stakeholders.
- ___ Scheduled a second Stakeholder meeting if necessary.
- ___ Contacted YCA to report progress.
- ___ Got Ready!

READY

Following the generative philosophical section and the action research-based methodological part of the toolkit-- **“Getting Ready to Get Ready”** and **“Getting Ready”**-- you are now prepared to explore the LTAB pedagogy. This part of the toolkit is centered on an immersive pedagogical collaboration between your stakeholders and master teachers/teaching artist from LTAB Chicago. Through a two-to-three day experiential training session, both during the slam and the days leading up to it, you and your team will gain the necessary skills to host LTAB slams on an ongoing basis. You will be able to say – **“We’re ready!”**

“The classroom with all its limitations remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom.” – bell hooks

Gaining an understanding of LTAB teaching principles will help you know what to look for as you develop, define, or redefine your team of teaching artists, educators, and poets. The LTAB pedagogy lives within the framework of two questions: where do you come from and how does that shape your story? Both questions are explored through a critical and public pedagogy. This section of the toolbox is reflexive as it does not only talk about the work we do with our students, but it aims to help you reflect on the “why” and “how” of your own pedagogy.

WHY

The LTAB teaching credo is rooted in hip hop poetics. KRS-One, a pioneer in hip hop, draws a connection between rap music today and oral poetic lineage by calling poetry “a poetic and rhythm-like mixture”. Hip hop poetics helps to provide a framework for “keeping things real” in our classrooms, poetry clubs, and after-school programs. For us, hip-hop is the expression of both a public and critical pedagogy. Public pedagogy, or a media-based critical pedagogy, brought to the fore by Henry Giroux interrogates the media’s representations of youth as scapegoats for many social problems and explores how young people are commodified by corporate culture. LTAB employs the frameworks of a public pedagogy in order to become facilitators making visible how and why misrepresentations of young people are constructed, to ask whose interests they serve, and to locate sites of resistance to disabling representations and oppressive cultural narratives. LTAB believes a public pedagogy helps educators understand their students, address the contexts of their everyday lives, and critically examine the media and other cultural artifacts that shape students’ cultural contexts.

Critical pedagogy, as bell hooks sees it, is the “decolonization of ways of knowing”. Changing the ways we “know” starts with modifying the questions we ask ourselves as well as those we ask the world around us. LTAB believes that questioning and challenging the misinformation constantly directed at our young people is an essential educational task—a duty we have as educators. We believe young people need to be engaged in their own education and then reengaged in their own lives. One of our aims as teachers is to help our young people analyze their relationship with the larger society in order to critically apprehend themselves as social agents and to imagine social relations outside of the existing configuration of power. We believe that the act of writing, speaking, listening to, and reflecting upon authentic youth stories helps young people work productively through the poetics of imagination in order to distinguish between reality as a fact and existence as a possibility. We believe these dreams need to be forged in relationship with others—not as an isolated poet perfecting the expressions of their pen on page—but rather working together as a collective of writers.

HOW

We provide a space for youth to talk about their lives, explore who they are, where they are from, and how they feel about the world. We are uniquely interested in the telling of stories, in re-telling of stories that have been left out, re-conceiving how dominant culture is telling stories and then re-presenting or representing them in new ways. LTAB constructs curriculum that draws upon the cultural resources that young people bring with them to the center of a space. We not only take the languages, histories, experiences, and voices of the students seriously, but also utilize the dynamics of the everyday and integrate those elements into the writing we do. We see the act of teaching as one that is responsive to the specific situation of each particular group of students and see education as taking place not only in the classroom but also wherever young people are. We teach so that a young person's lived experiences can position them at the center of their own educational space—one which defines their growth as artists, thinkers, friends, and cultural citizens.

NEXT STEPS: PART I

How will critical and public pedagogies fit into the context of the work you and your team do around organizing and preparing for the LTAB festival? Take a look at how Peter Kahn, world-class teacher at Oak Park and River Forest High School in Chicago—coach/founder of an annual school-wide slam and participant in LTAB Chicago -- puts these pedagogies into action. You will notice that the values of his teaching manifest in building relationships with students and creating a safe space for individual and collective expression. You will also be able to see how he built allies with his school administrators, generated interest in spoken word poetry, and maintains a mentorship relationship with current and former students. As you read through his story, pay special attention to the ways he engages his administration and other teachers, and how he thoughtfully creates ongoing safe spaces for students to practice and perform their writing. The result of his committed work in the lives of his students is remarkable!

TEACHING CHICAGO *BY PETER KAHN*

“Teaching spoken word poetry changes the face of education: students find a voice and teachers help them fulfill their full potentials.” - Peter Kahn, Co-Founder of the Writing Teachers Collective

After seven years as a traditional high school English teacher, it was time for a change. I began using Spoken Word Poetry/Slam in my classroom in 1998 and witnessed miraculous results with the lowest-performing students. Today, I am a full-time spoken word poetry, black literature educator, and project coordinator at Oak Park and River Forest High School in Chicago. I teach poetry to over 1500 of our students each year through school-day residencies and slam projects. I also founded, and help run, the largest school-based Spoken Word Club in the world. Our school team competes in Louder Than a Bomb each year and my student Nova Venerable was featured in the award-winning documentary. While the slam itself is an important vehicle for spoken word poetry, however, the bulk of the work I do is not competitive. It is this non-competitive aspect of programming that I will focus the bulk of my writing upon.

The key to getting the most out of spoken word poetry is combining poetry writing and performance with relationship-building. In spite of the obvious benefits of being able to teach spoken word poetry full-time at my school, convincing the powers-that-be to fund this position was not an easy sell. It started with approaching my administration. After several conversations about the needs for and benefits of spoken word poetry in areas of cognitive and psycho-social development, my school allowed me to go into all freshmen and sophomore English classes to lead a variety of programs—ranging from school day poetry workshops to school-wide Slam assemblies. From the school day workshops, students are “recruited” to join the aforementioned Spoken Word Club. From the club, six students are selected for the Slam team that competes each year in LTAB. Grades, accountability, and the ability to work on a team are as important as writing and performance skills in the selection process and students are suspended or removed from the team if their grades do not meet a high standard. This work allowed, and continues to allow, me to develop strong relationships with some of the toughest students in the school.

By starting with relationship-building and individual expression through writing and performance workshops, the culture of my school has changed. Math and science teachers regularly approach me to speak of the positive impact poetry has had on their struggling students. Every year, formerly resistant students end up joining the Spoken Word Club. Resistance is often eradicated through persistence and relationship-building. As a result, we often reach kids who were previously considered “un-reachable.” While not everyone is a fan of poetry—students and teachers alike—most everyone has come to value the larger community of students who write and perform their original poems.

The larger school community has adopted a belief that the process of writing and performance of spoken word poetry is important. A testament to their appreciation of the work is that this is the 9th year the board and administration have fully funded my position as a spoken word poetry and Black literature teacher. I have seen that the work I do is not just momentary and fleeting—it has changed the very course of some students’ lives. Here are six short stories of how poetry impacted the lives of my students.

TEACHING CHICAGO *BY PETER KAHN*

I'll start with Dan Sullivan—a world-renowned Spoken Word artist who was on the verge of dropping out of high school until we hooked him with poetry. I started our school club in 1999 largely because of him and now he helps me run it. He also started a very successful Spoken Word night—Urban Sandbox—to reach 15-25 year old poets in the area.

Will Walden was a goofy, unfocused student in my sophomore English class. He joined Spoken Word Club and ended up writing a poetic personal statement that helped him get into the University of Illinois, in spite of less than stellar grades. He earned a B.A. in English, used Spoken Word Poetry to help young people in Chicago and is now finishing law school at one of the most prestigious programs in the country—Northwestern University.

Iman Shumpert—who was a first round draft pick by the New York Knicks in the NBA, was recently featured in The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times, and who wrote a column for The New York Post—has cited several times the impact of our Spoken Word program. In a recent interview Shumpert recalls his experience and the influence spoken word poetry had on him by saying, “In high school, I was in a spoken word club, and it helped me to be better in music. The teacher, Mr. Kahn, was great at getting us to make something positive with our words as well as address issues and problems.” He even said he’s a better basketball player and rapper because of his experience he gained in our club.

Langston Kerman—an introverted high school student, Langston quit the basketball team to focus on poetry. It helped him to get into the University of Michigan, where he earned a B.A. in English. He came back to work with me for a year before earning a full ride to Boston University where he earned his M.F.A. in Poetry under the guidance of former National Poet Laureates Robert Pinsky and Louise Gluck. Langston’s now a full-time high school English teacher in Boston and does stand-up comedy, as well as continuing to write poetry.

I first met Asia Calcagno her freshman year when I visited her English class to teach a poetry unit. She joined the Spoken Word Club shortly after being exposed to the art form. Asia spent the next four years of high school as an active member of the club. Upon graduating she expressed how truly grateful she was for the existence of poetry and performance in her life. She said,

“In all honesty, Spoken Word has saved me. Starting high school, I was just a girl who needed to get a load of things off of her heart, and poetry was the only way I was capable of doing that. Writing has immensely impacted me as a student. I feel as if I blew through high school fairly easily because of the confidence and skills that I built through Spoken World Club. Mr. Kahn helped shape my voice as a writer and saw something bigger in me than I have seen myself. Because of Mr. Kahn’s support, I was able to enter college with my head held high.”

Asia is currently attending Connecticut College on a full tuition leadership scholarship through the Posse Foundation. She is also a finalist for the prestigious The Arts & Letters PRIME Poetry Prize.

TEACHING CHICAGO *BY PETER KAHN*

Nova Venerable was featured in the Louder Than a Bomb documentary. She won our all-Freshmen, all-Sophomore and all-Junior slams (beating out the aforementioned Iman Shumpert their Junior year). She was a three-time member of our slam team and was in all twelve of our Spoken Word Club showcases during her high school career. She was an angry, volatile young lady when she began high school and, as a result of her involvement with our program, ended up with several college scholarship offers by the time she graduated. She is about to earn a double BA from the prestigious Smith College and intends to go to medical school. She continues to write and perform poetry.

This model of a comprehensive curricular and extra-curricular program has made Oak Park and River Forest High School perhaps the most distinguished high school poetry-writing program in the country. We have won 8 national writing competitions in the past three years and one judge of a competition of over 600 entries from around the country where we finished first, second, *and* third, wrote:

“Your students’ poems were among the best I have ever read. And I have read a lot of scholastic poetry! Especially the first place poem--what insight. I also want to say that, as a poem of witness, its power is forceful and meaningful. What a teacher you must be to create an environment for students to write such poetry! I always believed that that is all we can do as writing teachers--create a writing environment of encouragement and helpful critique that enables students to find what they know--or didn’t know they knew!”

One of the club’s central tenets is that it is a safe place to poetically share one’s stories and that we become a family. This is evident in the dozens of alumni who have returned to work or volunteer for the program.

CRITICAL REFLECTION: PART III

[As] writing teachers [we] create a writing environment of encouragement and helpful critique that enables students to find what they know--or didn't know they knew!" – Anonymous Judge, Poetry Out Loud.

In his narrative, Peter discusses his process of teaching spoken word poetry at Oak Park and River Forest High School. He outlines a pedagogy based on relationship-building, student-centered learning, and safe educational spaces. Four of the steps Peter took in building a spoken word culture/space at his school are: (1) proposed teaching spoken word poetry full-time, (2) conducted a series of level one engagements through performances and workshops in classrooms, (3) facilitated level two engagements by starting a spoken word poetry club and getting interested students to participate, and (4) managed ongoing participation in level three engagements through mentorship and providing public platforms for individual/collective expression. Peter's situation is kind of a best-case scenario. Taking a post as a full-time spoken word poetry and Black Arts Literary teacher at his school is a unique opportunity—one from which we can glean pedagogically.

To continue working out our praxis, let's once again take some time to critically reflect on the LTAB pedagogy as YCA has framed it and as Peter outlined in his story.

CRITICAL REFLECTION ACTIVITY

1. Consider your own experiences as either an organizer and/or teacher working with teens. What do you believe your role is in the lives of young people in an educational context? What role do the students play in their own education? How have you, and/or your teaching artists, facilitated spaces of learning? Think of one concrete example. Reflect on what you learned from that experience. Write down your thoughts.

2. Consider why YCA takes both a critical and public pedagogical approach to teaching. Why might this framework be a successful way to engage youth in the context of spoken word poetry?

CRITICAL REFLECTION: PART III

3. Now think about both your ideas and YCA/Peter's ideas around pedagogy. Where do your pedagogies align? Where do they differ? Write down your thoughts.

4. Talk through these ideas with your team and select stakeholders. Think together on how these new ideas might influence your own pedagogies. Write down your thoughts.

Now that you have gained a generative knowledge about the LTAB pedagogy through the why/how section proposed by YCA, Peter's story, and the critical reflection exercise, you are ready for some action steps. The pedagogy section of the toolkit is at the end because like the philosophy, it holds together the work you do methodologically—specifically the work you do with young people. The influence and experiences you facilitate with youth poets in your city holds together the work of the festival. This metaphorical bookend will contain the stories like the testimonies heard in Peter's narrative of the lives of young people you helped influence.

While Peter's full-time spoken work poetry teaching position is an enviable position to be in, there are plenty of other ways to engage your own school and partner with schools in your city. One of the first ways you and your team of teaching artists can begin engaging schools is to use the LTAB documentary film curriculum. The film curriculum, part of the LTAB documentary educational DVD, is framed by a critical/public pedagogy, and the materials meet Language Arts Common Core Standards in Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening. Teaching these materials in an in-school context will help engender interest in spoken word poetry of both classroom teachers and students. It will also help train artists who might not have a lot of teaching experience, and provide you an inroad to creating partnerships with schools. Use the stakeholder sign-up sheet to see which teachers are interested in hosting a workshop and contact them. See the introduction of the film curriculum for more information on length, structure, and material needs for the workshops.

A second way for you and your team to prepare for the slam is to host a professional development training led by LTAB Chicago master teachers and teaching artists. Here your action steps focus on preparing for, facilitating, and implementing an immersive pedagogical experience between your core team of organizers/teaching artists and LTAB Chicago. Below is an outline of five key action steps to take to

prepare for the professional development training around the festival: Plan It, Think about It, Announce It, Host it, and Evaluate It. The goals of the training are to facilitate an experience which includes in-school performances, a workshop series, and the first annual slam hosted by LTAB Chicago with the help of your core team of organizers. This experience will prepare you and your team for future festivals. By the end of the professional development training you will be able to say – “We're Ready!”

FOUR MONTHS BEFORE THE FESTIVAL

ACTION STEPS

TIMELINE

This guide is organized around a suggested timeline. It is always good to plan ahead, but you can easily modify this timeline to fit your schedule and resources.

THE VISION

Two things are important when looking for school partners. First be sure to target at least four schools—one school from different parts of your city. This is key in intentional community organizing. Remember the work of LTAB is about bringing segregated cities together. Second make sure you are looking for natural partners. You should not have to force this work to happen. Rely on your organizing committee members to assist with making these connections. Chances are you already have interested and able in-school teachers who can't wait to start a poetry team!

REMEMBER

Finding school partners from all parts of your city is crucial in galvanizing the telling of different stories by students of diverse backgrounds. Focus on relationship building and creating safe classroom space to foster authentic youth voice. Use the YCA levels of engagement framework as you begin working with teachers/students. Look for level-three partnerships.

Starting LTAB poetry teams through relationship building and level-one engagements is the first step to planning. Identify at least four schools to partner with, contact the school administration and/or classroom teacher, and set a date and time to bring in a select teaching artist to facilitate at least one of the units from the film curriculum. This will generate interest in being a part of a poetry team. Both teacher/teaching artist should make recruitment part of the goal of this level-one engagement. Once you find at least 8 to 10 interested participants from each school you're ready to move to step two.

Step two—a level-two engagement—is about hosting a workshop series in order to create a space for students to tell their stories on a more on-going basis. It is key to have the same teaching artist that did the initial delivery be an ongoing coach for this team. Try and meet at least one to two times a week after school at the school site to conduct the workshops. Continue this work all the way up to the festival. Recall the importance of student-centered learning, safe classroom spaces, and relationship building as key components of working with young people. Use the rest of the film curriculum to get students writing and performing. By the end of workshop six-- assuming that you taught one of the units in an in-class setting to recruit students—participants will have five individuals pieces and one group piece to critique and refine.

Step three—a level-three engagement-- is about mentorship. At this point the students will be ready to polish their writing and bring it to life through performance. One great way to do facilitate constructive critique is to get the other poets on the team involved in encouraging one another on aspects of the materials they like/dislike. The coach/teaching artists should carve out space in the after-school meetings to work on both the individual and group pieces.

ACTION STEPS

FINDING A VENUE

Find a location with a stage that comfortably fits your projected audience size-- not too large and not too small. Once you've found a venue talk to them about how they might help with advertising.

SELECT A DATE

Pick a day to host the slam, based on the venue's availability and research. Look at school calendars. Do not host the slam during heavy times of testing or other literary conferences and/or activities.

MEDIA PARTNER AND MARKETING

Your venue might have an existing media partner. See if they would be willing to connect you with them. Local news or radio stations are great media partners. Ask a graphic designer for an in-kind donation of creating a flyer to announce the event. Use the LTAB logo for branding or create an altogether new one.

MANDATORY COACHES MEETING

Because this meeting is mandatory, do your best to schedule a date and time that works for everyone. Both teacher/coach do not have to be in attendance. One representative for the team is enough.

THREE MONTHS BEFORE THE FESTIVAL

Getting familiar with the LTAB slam structure is the next step to preparing for the youth poetry festival. Meet with your team of organizers and discuss the various details involved in hosting the slam. Whether you are a seasoned spoken word artist or new to the scene, the following contents located in the appendix pg. 80 – 83 will help you in the organizing process. Feel free to update and modify the materials after reviewing the contents.

- LTAB rules
- DJ guide
- Venue and set up
- Bout sheets
- Registration forms
- MC scripts
- Judges rules

Next, brainstorm a list of possible venues and dates to host the slam. Task a committee member or group to begin conversations with potential venues. Then think about avenues for advertising the festival. Talk to your contact at the venue and see what type of advertising they do around programs. Put a committee or group member in charge of looking for a media partner. Advertising for the event is crucial for filling the house. A full house provides necessary energies for the youth poets to perform and broadens the influence of their stories among residents city-wide. After that, brainstorm some dates to host a coaches meeting. The coaches meeting should occur two-months before the slam and is mandatory for all participating teams. The meeting covers registration information for all teams, slam rules, and Q&A. Task a committee member or group to research the best days, times, and locations to host the meeting. The meeting should take no more than an hour and a half.

As first year participants, LTAB Chicago will provide on-the-ground professional development (PD) training at the slam and during the week of the festival. Take the time to read through the PD outline located in the appendix on pg. 84 and familiarize yourselves with what you can expect.

Finally, as a group, think about your strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats (S.W.O.T), as related to the slam. S.W.O.T. is a needs assessment. It will help you and your team outline and define how you are excelling and where your opportunities for growth might be. This is an important step to take before both the festival and the LTAB PD training.

TWO AND A HALF MONTHS BEFORE THE FESTIVAL

SAMPLE AGENDA

VENUE	\$0 - \$2,000
DJ	\$0 - \$150
ADVERTISING	\$0 - \$250
SNACKS/CATERING	\$0 - \$250
PD	\$5,000-\$8,000
TOTAL COST	\$5,000-\$10,650

SUPPLEMENTING COSTS

The event does not need to be expensive to be successful. At this point you have worked hard to identify your key stakeholders. Rely on these folks to help provide in-kind donations/sponsorships.

Ask a venue to donate or cut the costs of booking their space. The venue can be a school auditorium, theater, music venue, church, etc.

Ask the DJ to donate their time and in exchange allow them to sell their mix tapes during the festival. Talk to the venue's marketing director and see if they can help with advertising. Use Facebook and twitter to advertise. Those sights are free.

Food costs can be assuaged by getting sponsorships from a local grocery story. The trade-off can be that you put the grocery stores name on your flyers and acknowledge them at the festival.

Charging a small admissions fee to the event to cover the costs of PD. Be creative!

Logistics are vital in organizing the festival and confirming that major tasks are completed, and can make the planning a lot less stressful and more exciting. Important logistics for this event are securing following needs:

- Confirming the venue for the festival
- Scheduling and announcing the mandatory coaches meeting
- Confirming a media partner
- Locating a food sponsor
- Booking the PD
- Booking the DJ

Make sure you have a contract from the venue confirming the date of the festival. Once you have booked the space and put a date in place you are ready to host the coaches meeting. If you are anticipating a large group, make sure the space has a microphone. Task a committee member with drafting an email to send out to all coaches/teachers announcing the goal of the meeting, date, time, and location. Make a note at the end of the email asking them to confirm their attendance week before the meeting. Have another committee member or group prepare the agenda for the gathering. The agenda should include the following:

- Introductions: Find out who is in the room
- Festival Details: Announce the date, time, location of the Festival
- PD Outline: Announce training opportunities, workshops, and Slam guests
- Marketing: Coaches/Teachers post flyers at their schools
- Finalize Registration: Get names, emails, contact # of each student performer
- Review LTAB Rules
- Review the Slam Structure
- Q&A

Assign one committee member to print enough materials -- rules, flyers, PD outline, and slam structure-- to distribute to each coach. Create one sign-up sheet for teachers for PD training. Have one more person bring music to the meeting to set a tone as guests arrive. Finally, book your DJ and contact Young Chicago Authors to schedule the PD training: info@youngchicagoauthors.org or 773.486.4331.

TWO MONTHS BEFORE THE FESTIVAL

SAMPLE AGENDA

WELCOME/INTRODUCTIONS	10 MINUTES
DETAILS ABOUT THE SLAM	10 MINUTES
PD LEADING UP TO THE SLAM	20 MINUTES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IN-SCHOOL PERFORMANCES • WORKSHOPS • HOSTS OF THE SLAM FOR THE FIRST YEAR. • NEEDS-ACCOMMODATIONS, ADVERTISING, & SCHOOL PARTICIPATION. • GETTING INVOLVED 	
PREPARING FOR THE SLAM	15 MINUTES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LTAB RULES • REGISTRATION 	
QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION	20-25 MINUTES
CLOSING COMMENTS/PD SIGN UP	5 MINUTES
TOTAL TIME	1.5 HOURS

REMINDER

Send a reminder message on Facebook or via e-mail the day of the event. Have your members discuss the meeting throughout the day to ensure everyone is there. Highlight that this meeting is mandatory.

FOLLOW UP

Send thank you letters or e-mails to all coaches and include copies of all materials as attachments.

Have members of your organizer committee get to the coaches meeting space about a half hour before the meeting begins. Assign your volunteers the following tasks. If you are anticipating a large group of guests, make sure you have a microphone—if you don't, project your voice. The person in charge of the microphone should test the equipment and have it working by the time people start to arrive. It is also nice to have the music playing to set the fun and exciting ambiance. Greeters should know where the bathrooms are so people can be easily directed.

SET-UP

- Set up chairs in a circle for the coaches
- Set up one or two tables near the entrance so coaches/teachers can register their teams and grab materials: rules, PD outline, slam structure, and flyers.
- If needed, set up microphone. Play music as guests arrive.
- Greet coaches/teachers.

MEETING

Once all the tasks have been completed and the guests start to arrive it is important to be professional and follow the agenda for the meeting. Make sure you have one facilitator for the meeting, and stick to the agenda. Enjoy the meeting and be flexible: some parts of the meeting may take longer or less time than anticipated but being natural and moving along with the plan will ensure take you are respecting the expected timeline. Before the meeting is over, make sure you review the registration information and ask teachers/coaches to sign-up to host professional development performance at their school. See if anyone would like to host the LTAB poets at their home—make sure they have enough space and can accommodate the needs of the poets. Make the sign-up sheet available at the door so teachers can register their schools prior to leaving the meeting.

ONE MONTH BEFORE THE FESTIVAL

REMINDER

Collaboration is at the heart of the work of LTAB. As such, it is YCA's intention to organize and custom-tailor the professional development to meet the needs of our partners. In order to do so please be sure to give plenty of time for conversation between your stakeholders and YCA.

Logistics are essential in organizing and confirming that major tasks are completed before the PD /Festival take place. Planning ahead will ensure you get the most out of this immersive training experience and are prepared for the festival. Important logistics in preparing for the collaboration are:

- Finalizing the itinerary and selecting which LTAB Chicago master teaching artist(s) will conduct the training
- Scheduling and announcing the in-school performances and workshops to students, teachers, and coaches
- Locating a space to conduct the workshops
- Finding and booking accommodations for the teaching artists including transportation
- Sending the itinerary and accommodation information to Mariah at YCA
- Gathering materials for judges and competition winners
- Finding a DJ and getting someone to document the slam through video/photos.
- Updating and outlining your S.W.O.T. assessment

Once you have talked through these details and brainstormed logistics, you are ready to divide out tasks to individual team members. First, ask a committee member to work with Mariah at YCA and create an itinerary. Approach the conversation with Mariah with ideas of who you would like to conduct the training, the dates of delivery, and have your budget available. Next, have an organizer or group of organizers work on scheduling the in-school performances. Use the sign-up sheet from the mandatory coaches meeting as a starting point—the sign-up sheet will have contact information for a school administrator. Call, email, or talk to school administrators in order to schedule the performances. Approach this conversation with a date and several options for times of deliver. Then, ask another member to locate accommodations. Our teaching artists have different room needs, especially if you have a male and female come out. Connect with the committee member who booked the PD in order to get an idea of needs. Next, assign someone to pick up small dry erase boards and markers for judges, and certificates for the winning team. Next, find a DJ and select someone to document the festival. Finally, have another team member review the S.W.O.T assessment and make modifications. Once all tasks are completed, send a final itinerary to Young Chicago Authors.

THREE WEEKS BEFORE THE FESTIVAL**ACTION STEPS****MEDIA**

Create a press release for your media partner.

Make sure you have all of the correct information: date, time, location, participating schools, and information about LTAB Chicago Teaching artists.

FLYERS

Post flyers in locations you've targeted as potential stakeholders, i.e. neighborhood libraries, literacy organizations, schools, etc.

FACE-TO-FACE

Talk about the festival with friends, family, neighbors, co-workers. Make it a point to engage people individually.

SOCIAL NETWORKING

As the festival approaches be sure to create and maintain a buzz on twitter about the slam by announcing the professional development workshops, in-school performances, and any other events leading up to the big day.

FACEBOOK

Although it does take some work, be sure to continue updating and maintain your Facebook page as you prepare for LTAB in your city.

MEDIA OUTREACH AND FACE-TO-FACE

The best way to announce the festival is through word-of-mouth. Use the sign-up sheet and connections made at the screening, stakeholder, and coaches meetings to re-connect with your stakeholders. Talk about the festival with partners at other organizations' events, throughout the preparation process, and whenever you run into them. Make it a priority to have seven points of contact with your targeted audiences: face-to-face, advertisement, flyers, Twitter, Facebook, phone, and email.

Recall the mapping project you and your committee conducted at the beginning stages of planning. Think strategically how you can reach out to these different neighborhoods in your city. One of the easiest ways is to start with the four schools you've targeted in different locations. Ask teachers and administrators if they would be willing to include the Slam event in their school newspaper, on their marquee, and during morning announcements. Getting the schools on board will also help to gain the interests of more students. Once the young people are excited about the event, they will talk about it with their peer groups and encourage their friend to attend the event.

Make sure when reaching out to your targeted schools you connect with the same contact person at the school. Unless your contact has indicated otherwise, phone calls or face-to-face visits are always best. When you connect with them come prepared with flyers and a press release. Every school has different policies about posting flyers and including outside organizations access to announce extra-curricular activities. If you don't feel like you have gained the trust of the school administration, it will be best to have the hosting teacher/coach that works at the school, do the asking. If that is the case, meet with the teachers and provide the same information to them. Be sure you are ready to answer any questions they may have. Remind them that the goal of the advertisement is not just to get "rear-ends in seats", but it is to provide a platform for the youth poets to tell their stories and give them an opportunity to connect with students from other schools.

Finally, although the media announcements are three weeks before the festival, you will want to be sure to maintain a buzz up until the moment of the slam. Ask a committee member or group to maintain the Facebook page and twitter feed.

ONE WEEK BEFORE THE FESTIVAL

SAMPLE SET UP TIMELINE

CHECK INTO VENUE	10AM
STAFF/CREW MEETING	10 - 10:30AM
SET-UP	10:30 - 12:00PM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BEGIN DOCUMENTATION • RESERVE SEATS FOR JUDGES AND POETS • DJ SET UP ON STAGE • SET LIGHTING • PUT OUT TABLES FOR CATERING • DESIGNATE GREEN ROOM FOR POETS • PROVIDE PROGRAMS FOR USHERS • CHECK-IN WITH BOX OFFICE/PROVIDE A COMP LIST IF YOU HAVE ONE 	
SNACKS/CATERING DELIVERY	12PM
BREAK	12 - 12:30PM
TOTAL TIME	2.5 HRS

SAMPLE CHECK IN TIMELINE

CHECK-IN LTAB TEAMS	12:30 - 1PM
CROSSING THE STREETS WORKSHOP	1-3PM
DRAW BOUT SEQUENCE	3 - 3:30PM
TOTAL TIME	3HRS

DEVELOP A FESTIVAL TIMELINE

It is important to know how the festival is going to run and in what order things are going to happen to execute a smooth and successful gathering. LTAB Chicago will help you with this process for the first year of the slam. See the sample agenda in the margin to gain a better idea of how things can run.

FINALIZE LOGISTICS

Verify that all arrangements for location, catering, materials, music/DJ, documentation, and AV (lights/sound) are settled. The organizer should assign tasks to other members based on the agenda.

ASSIGN MEMBERS TO:

- Confirm final details with your venue – check-in time, space needs, etc.
- Coordinate and set up catering
- Create a festival timeline and email it out to participants prior to the day of the festival
- Create and print programs for the slam and bout sheets. Make sure the program includes names/logos of all your sponsors.
- If you are charging a fee at the door and have complimentary tickets, have someone coordinate these details with the box office.
- Be in charge of the AV equipment or work with the venue’s stage manager to set lights and sound.
- Work with the venues house manager to coordinate volunteer ushers and program distribution.
- One person should take care of poet/artist check in.
- Another should check in judges and volunteers.

ONE WEEK BEFORE THE FESTIVAL**SAMPLE CHECK-IN TIMELINE**

CHECK-IN FEATURING ARTISTS	3PM
SOUND/STAGE CHECK	3:30 – 4:30PM
CHECK-IN JUDGES/SCORE KEEPER /VOLUNTEER USHERS	4PM
REVIEW JUDGES RULES/SCORE KEEPER TASK/ USHER WORK	4:15 – 4:45PM
OPEN HOUSE TO PUBLIC	4:30PM
CALL PLACES FOR POETS/ARTISTS	4:45PM
TOTAL TIME	2 HRS

SAMPLE SLAM TIMELINE

START SLAM	5:00PM
INTRODUCTIONS BY HOST	5:00PM
SACRIFICIAL POET	5:15PM
BOUT #1 INDIE	5:20PM
FEATURE PERFORMANCE	6:00PM
BOUT #2 INDIE	6:10PM
FEATURE PERFORMANCE	6:50PM
BOUT #3 INDIE	6:55PM
FEATURE PERFORMANCE	7:15PM
BOUT #4 TEAM	7:20PM
FEATURE PERFORMANCE	7: 40PM
AWARDS	7:50PM
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS/DISMISSAL	8:00PM
TOTAL TIME	3HRS

REMEBER

While LTAB Chicago poets will help run the first year of the festival, it is important that all logistics are taken care of before the day of the slam. Feel free to call or email Young Chicago Authors and talk through specific needs.

Begin to consider who from your team already is, or would make a great slam host, bout manager, and/or teaching artist. Assign these folks to shadow the LTAB Chicago poets as they implement the festival-- that way your team can get real hands-on training.

THE DAY OF THE FESTIVAL

ACTION STEPS

REMINDER

Send a reminder message on Facebook and twitter both the day before and the day of the festival.

FOLLOW UP

Send thank you letters or e-mails to sponsors and donors, and include personal notes about how they made the festival a possible.

Think about the stakeholders who have not donated to the festival, but showed interest in supporting the work. Schedule a meeting with them shortly after the festival is over. Ask them what they thought of the slam and whether or not they would be interested in supporting the next one. Follow up with asking them how they would like to bolster the work.

Send thank you letters and/or celebrate with your team of organizers after the festival is over. Be specific when thanking your team—highlight key and meaningful moments.

SET-UP

Have committee members get to the venue at set call time. LTAB Chicago poets will get a ride to the venue by their designated driver and meet you there at the same time. After checking in with the venue staff, have a short meeting to run through the timeline for the day. Be sure your members know their assigned tasks.

If the venue has a stage manager, work with them to set up sound, lights, and stage. If not, assign someone experienced with light/sound skills to do the set up. Secure a space to conduct the “Crossing the Streets Workshop”. The workshop can also happen on the stage – the house will be closed to the public and the featuring artists will not be checking in until after the workshop is over. Set up tables for catering. Reserve seating for five to six judges in the first couple of rows in the back of the house (orchestra seating). If the venue has a house manager, work with them to learn where the bathrooms, disability seating, and green rooms are located—if not, task someone with finding their way around the space. The person with bout sheets, score sheet, dry erase boards, etc. (all slam materials) will work with LTAB Chicago to help prepare the materials. With a great team of organizers, the set-up should only take one and a half hours.

Remember to take a break to eat and rest once the catering arrives. Then meet poets at the entrance of the venue to check in. Have several available people guide teams to where the workshop is held as they arrive. If all your tasks are completed up until this point, join in on the workshop. After the workshop is over you will have one and half hours before guests begin to arrive. Have the poets work with the coaches/teachers to warm-up for the slam.

Continue with part two of the set up: checking in judges and volunteers. Finally as guests arrive, enjoy their company. Mix and mingle with parents, administrators, etc. You’ve work hard to make this festival happen so enjoy the event!

ACTION STEPS

FURTHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Young Chicago Authors hosts two annual workshops for teaching artists, students, and organizers: one in the summer and one during the time of the festival.

Check out their website for upcoming events and workshops: www.youngchiagoauthors.org

NEXT STEPS

Taking the time to conduct a debriefing session is important for evaluating your work—an important step in developing your praxis. The meeting should take place the morning after the festival as things will be fresh in everyone's mind. LTAB Chicago poets will facilitate this discussion as to provide an opportunity for all organizers to participate in the conversation. Your S.W.O.T. assessment comes in handy at this meeting. The outline will remind you and your team where you excelled in organizing, teaching, and coaching, and where opportunities for growth lie. The goal of the debriefing session is to engender critical reflection which leads to a thoughtfully co-created plan of next steps.

If you and your team are unable to host a debriefing session the day after the festival, we can arrange a post-mortem Skype meeting on another day. If you decide to meet on another day, select the day before everyone leaves and send a follow up email reminding committee members of the date and time.

If you are able to meet the following day, consider hosting a brunch at someone's home or a near-by restaurant. If the meeting is in a restaurant, pick a place that is not too loud. Besides celebrating the teams' accomplishments through a shared meal, the focus of the meeting is discussion.

Select a note taker for the meeting and remember to bring your S.W.O.T. assessment outline. At the meeting, you can expect LTAB Chicago poets to ask you the following questions: how did your understanding of the LTAB philosophy, methodology, and pedagogy play a role your planning process; how were concepts in the toolbox different, similar, or a fusion of your own ideas about Youth Spoken Word Poetry; which parts of the planning process were the most difficult to execute; did the amount of people that attended the festival align with your projected number; what, if anything, would like more mentorship on; overall, what went well and what needs improvement?

READY CHECKLIST

- ___ Generative knowledge about the Louder Than a Bomb pedagogy.
- ___ Completed Critical Reflection Part III
- ___ Found and booked a venue to host the slam.
- ___ Set a day for the LTAB festival.
- ___ Hosted an organizers meeting to plan and prepare for the slam.
- ___ Sent an announcement about the mandatory coaches meeting to all coaches.
- ___ Contacted YCA to schedule Professional Development (PD) with LTAB Chicago Poets.
- ___ Announced the LTAB Festival date, time, and location to all stakeholders.
- ___ Prepared all written/visual materials for the coaches meeting: flyers, PD outline, PD sign-up sheet, etc.
- ___ Hosted a mandatory coaches/teachers meeting.
- ___ Sent a follow up email to coaches outlining dates/times of in-school performances, “Crossing the Streets”, the festival, and included attachments of all relevant written materials.
- ___ Stayed in communication with all teachers/coaches as they prepare for the festival.
- ___ Registered all slam teams from local schools from different parts of the city.
- ___ Scheduled and confirmed in-school PD performances with hosting schools.
- ___ Sent festival itinerary to Mariah at YCA to distribute to LTAB Chicago poets.
- ___ Found a media partner and began to advertise the Festival.
- ___ Booked a DJ.
- ___ Asked five to six persons to serve as judges.
- ___ Assigned someone to document the festival through video and photography.
- ___ Secured accommodations for all LTAB Chicago poets.
- ___ Created, modified, and printed slam materials: programs, festival itinerary, bout sheets, certificates.
- ___ Purchased small dry erase boards with markers for Judges.
- ___ Maintained advertising around the festival through Facebook, twitter, and the media partner.
- ___ Assigned tasks to all organizers to help with set up the day of the festival.
- ___ Ready!

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (PD)

ABOUT

YCA takes a grassroots approach to community organizing and does so by: developing new relationships with teachers, schools administrators, youth, local poets, activists, donors; and coordinating volunteers committed to the LTAB festival. This professional development training takes place both on days before and during the festival. Please see the outline below for details. Note-- this is not a set schedule—we are able to work with you collaboratively to meet your vision, mission, and staff/teacher/student needs..

DAY	DELIVERY	DELIVERABLE
1	LTAB Master teaching artist, LTAB teaching apprentice(s), and a local teaching artist in four to eight high schools conducting workshops.	45 Min to 1 hour school-wide assemble by the LTAB master teacher/teaching apprentice(s) to create a buzz around the festival.
2	“Crossing the Street” is a mandatory workshop for all participating poets. This dynamic interactive workshop sets the stage for the festival as it de-emphasizing the competition and puts the focus of the slam back on the telling and listening to everyone’s stories. The heart of the workshop is to build connections between young people from different parts of the city. Teachers and coaches are welcome to participate.	2 hour master class to prepare youth poets for the slam. Outcomes are new knowledge(s) of students living in other parts of the city and renewed focus -- “the point is not the point the point is the poetry.”
3	Debriefing session with LTAB Chicago poets and all core organizers. Discussion about S.W.O.T. (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats), and facilitated critical reflection process which culminates in building a plan for next steps.	2 hour post-mortem session led by LTAB Chicago poets with all invested organizers. Culminates in a plan for next steps.

LTAB ELIGIBILITY ENTRY

- Participants must be enrolled in a designated high school (or have completed school during the same academic year of the LTAB festival).
- High school individual poets must be sponsored by an adult mentor/coach who works with a school. Teams must be sponsored by their school mentor/coach.
- If students sign up and find out later that they will not be able to participate, please notify the LTAB-organizer ASAP so that an alternate performer can have the chance to participate in the slam.
- Participants must attend “Crossing the Street” daytime workshop in its entirety. Non-attendance may result in disqualification. Notify LTAB organizers as soon as possible about participant absence.

COMPETITION

- Participants must be physically present and checked in at least 30 minutes before the slam begins. Lateness to a scheduled bout time may result in disqualification for the participant.
- Each poem must be under three (3) minutes in length. Scores will be penalized for going over the time limit. Penalties will begin at 3:10 (a .5 point deduction for every ten seconds overtime). Poets will be asked to leave the stage if the time reaches 4:10.
- Participants must perform a piece of their own original writing. Participants who plagiarize will be disqualified. Quoting other works and utilizing literary allusion are not plagiarism.
- Props, costumes, and/or musical accompaniment may not be used in the slam.
- Content matter may not exceed a PG-13 rating (avoid excessive violence, sexually explicit content and/or language that is degrading to any group of people). Failure to heed the PG-13 rating will result in a .5 deduction from the poet’s score for each infraction.
- Profanity and discriminatory language are prohibited. Violations will result in a .5 penalty for every infraction. What constitutes a content infraction is up to the discretion of the individual bout manager.
- A mixed panel of artists, educators, youth and community members will be pre-chosen to judge each bout. Judges will not be affiliated with the school teams who participate in LTAB (and teams can challenge a judge to the bout manager if they anticipate unfairness).
- All protests of possible rule infractions must be lodged with the bout manager before the end of the day on which the possible infraction occurred. The bout manager will review the complaint with the rest of the tournament staff before making a decision regarding potential consequences. The decision will be presented to the affected individuals the next morning (or earlier if time-sensitive).

YOUTH POET

LTAB competitors must be a student in your high school and must be 19 years old or under. They will be expected to write and perform original work individually, and in a group of four young poets performing a team poem together. (Note: the four-person group poem designation is an intentional artistic choice by the chief organizers of LTAB as a way to encourage the community building mission that is essential to Louder Than a Bomb).

COACH

Schools should designate a coach as both a mentor and one who is responsible for organizing practices. If a coach is unable to commit to effectively mentoring their home school's team, a guest educator may step in as a de-facto coach, and that educator will be recognized accordingly. It is important that everyone know the realistic commitment they are making. Students in a team are required to write a performance poem (1 solo poem and they may later contribute to the four-person group poem) that are all 3 minutes long or less, and they must attend the "Crossing the Street" Workshop on (date/time) and the Final Slam on (date/time). Coaches must remain in contact with (Organizer Name) before and during all of these events.

NEEDS

One coach and a minimum of four to max of six youth poets. Up to SIX poets maximum will be on your school's team. You may elect to compete with poets A, B, C, and D for the individual rounds and then take out C and D and add E and F into the group poem. However, any of the six poets may be chosen for the four-person group piece round.

TIMELINE

Coaches and teams can expect to begin preparations for the festival through team practices, "Crossing the Street" workshop, and participation in the slam. Coaches are also tasked with attending the mandatory coaches meeting. Preparation and participation will last from (Date of Coaches meeting) through (Date of Festival).

IMPORTANT DATES AND EVENTS

Make a list of date, times, and location of any and all of the activities teams will need to participate in that lead up the festival. For example:

Thursday Feb 9, 2012 – CROSSING THE STREET Workshop with Kevin Coval and Nate Marshall. (Time TBD) *All four (4) teams (plus Holland Hall) are invited to attend this daytime workshop to be held at OU-Tulsa. Attendance is only mandatory for the four (4) Teams Competing in the Finals, and the remaining five (5) high scoring individuals that will also be competing in the individual slam during the Finals.*

TEAM INFORMATION AND SLAM LOGISTICS

There will be four students maximum and two alternates competing per school. Four students perform individual poems and four will perform in the group poem.

All students write one three (3) minute piece. Coaches must select FOUR students for a 3 min individual poem in the finals and may then choose to mix in the additional two poets on the team for their 3 min, 4-person group poem to perform at the slam. Highest scoring team overall wins. Highest scoring individual overall wins. Individuals may repeat their individual team competition poem or perform a new one for the individual slam.

The individual bouts will be the first four rounds and the fifth bout is a group round.

1. Individual Slam: ONE round of 4 individual poems. Individual round will follow the team competition.
2. Five Judges per bout.
3. Each poem will be scored on a scale of 0.0 to 10.0, using one decimal place to avoid ties. Highest and lowest scores are crossed out and the remaining three are tallied for each performance.
4. To determine the winning team individual and team scores will be added. The highest score wins.
5. Special individual recognitions (certificates) for all teams will also be ceremonially awarded.
6. Each school must have a minimum of four and a maximum of six poets on their team competing at final slam. Four poets will compete individually, and four poets will compete in a group poem. If at least a four-poet team from your school will not be present for the Final Slam, please notify the organizers immediately to devise an alternate plan.
7. Only one team per school/organization is allowed at the LTAB Slam (e.g., one high school may not send four teams to slam). LTAB Poets should be affiliated with the organization they represent or the school they attend.
8. Teams should send the same poets whose names are on the entry form, unless the LTAB organizers are otherwise notified before the bouts. After that, only registered team members may compete. If a registered team member cannot compete after the competition has started please contact (name of organizers and contact information) ASAP.
9. Teams can repeat the poems they perform from previous bouts – teams must prepare at least one individual poem per team member and one four-person group poem.
10. No poet may compete with more than one individual poem (and/or one group poem in the Final) round in a single bout.
11. While the entire team may contribute to the writing of a group piece, only four team members may perform the group piece, and all group piece performers must have been involved in the writing of that piece.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. We encourage you to memorize the poems you will perform in competition with, though it is not required.
2. Alternate team members are encouraged, especially if full team members need to drop out of the competition.
3. Don't start your poem until you are ready. Make sure the mics are well placed and that the audience and judges can hear you. Once you begin, your time begins, so be sure you are utilizing all your available resources on stage. A bout manager will be there to assist you with what you need.
4. Rehearse! Be certain that each team member is audible and understandable (and performing the greatest poem ever written).
5. Be respectful of yourself, the youth writing community, and the group you represent.
6. Bring people out to support you when you read.
7. The slam is at the mercy of the judges, who may give you lower scores for various reasons, including their mood on that day, their personal tastes or other factors. *If you feel you may be particularly sensitive to this, then we encourage you to assess whether slamming is right for you.*
8. We advise teams to *have as much fun as possible* and be as prepared as they can be and the competitive ends usually take care of themselves.
9. PLEASE remember the LTAB-T Mantra, "The Point is not the Points, the Point is the Poetry" and try to uphold the spirit of community and an awareness of subjectivity and objectivity that is part of the slam convention.

LETTER TO SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

(LOGO HERE)

Dear (Insert Principal/Administrator Name):

(Name of sponsoring organization) wants to thank you for your school's participation in the Louder Than A Bomb (LTAB) poetry slam festival and for giving us the opportunity to make this event as life-changing as it has been for young people in Chicago.

(Name of sponsoring organization) is thrilled to be bringing the LTAB poetry festival to (name of city).

LTAB is a friendly competition and is the largest team youth poetry slam festival in the world, emphasizing self-expression and community across racial, neighborhood, gang, and socioeconomic lines. Youth participation in LTAB has proven to elevate writing, reading, listening and speaking skills, while also aid in the development of tolerance for others.

We are asking you to support your school's team during this year's competition. The team has worked very hard preparing for the festival, attending weekly meetings, writing outside of school, studying the work of other writers, and practicing their performance skills. The team fee is (\$\$\$) and covers administrative costs, t-shirts, participation and entrance to all festival events, and more. We ask that you support your team at the least by covering this fee and by excusing them from school for their bouts during the festival, allowing them to express their visions for the future and hear the other brilliant student writers from across (name of city).

Also, please contact me if you would like to discuss the LTAB curriculum. We would love to help cultivate the poetry community in your school, as our educational model is aligned with state goals and standards for literary arts. We offer workshops, classes, and assemblies in which we incorporate live performances from past LTAB finalists, and help you recruit young poets and writers from your community—even those who might not know that they are writers yet!

Sincerely,

(Your name)

(Your organization)

(Your title)

(Email)

(Phone)

(LOGO HERE)

(year) ANNUAL LOUDER THAN A BOMB: YOUTH POETRY FESTIVAL HOSTS (number of students) from (names of schools) Competition is on (date(s)) with Finals at (name of location) on (date)

Prior to the Festival will be a special screening of the acclaimed documentary

Louder Than A Bomb at the (name of location), (date)

(Name of Media Partner) and (Name of Your Organization) are thrilled to present the (year) Annual Louder Than A Bomb (LTAB): Youth Poetry Festival. The largest of its kind in the world, LTAB is a rapidly-growing teen poetry festival, this year taking place at (name of location) and (date).

Aiming to bring teens together across racial, gang, and socio-economic lines, LTAB is a friendly competition that emphasizes self-expression and community through poetry, oral story-telling, and hip-hop spoken word. Traditionally operating outside of regular school programming, LTAB teams are often founded by students and coached pro-bono by teachers. This year's festival will feature (number of teams) and (number of students). The festival is an Olympic-style poetry competition with slam preliminaries and semi-final bouts running all day (dates), followed by finals at (location), (date), and (time). In addition to the competition will be workshops, showcases, and panel discussions.

"LTAB is a safe and judgment free outlet where kids from all over the city can share stories and break stereotypes, challenging themselves and their audience," explains author and LTAB co-founder and artistic director Kevin Coval. "For three minutes at a time the students speak about their lives, but for the other eighty-seven minutes, they are listening to the lives and stories and dreams of others. It is an extraordinary event and we encourage the public to come out and witness the incredible youth of (name of city)."

In anticipation of the festival, Emmy award-winning filmmakers Jon Siskel and Greg Jacobs will present their critically-acclaimed documentary, Louder Than A Bomb, at the (name of location), (date), and (time). The film followed festival participants in the year leading up to the 2008 finals and was awarded the Audience Choice Award and Special Jury Prize at the 2010 Chicago International Film Festival.

Competition and slam highlights this year include:

- Haiku Slam at Columbia College Chicago, 618 S. Michigan, Sunday, February 27 at 2pm

Non-slam highlights include:

- Roger Bonair-Agard and Idris Goodwin book release at Columbia College Chicago, 618 S. Michigan, Friday, February 25 at 7pm

PRESS RELEASE EXAMPLE, CONTINUED

For more information and the full festival schedule please visit (name of website). For all ticketed events, prices range from (\$ - \$) for students and (\$ - \$) for adults and are available at (name of website). Additionally, tickets for (name of event) at (name of location) are free to anyone with a (name of school district) ID card.

About (name of media partner)

Chicago Public Media is an institution that creates award-winning content for people seeking to learn more about the issues and ideas that affect our community, our nation, and our world. Chicago Public Media produces programs such as This American Life, Sound Opinions, Wait, Wait...Don't Tell Me! (a co-production with NPR), Eight Forty-Eight, Worldview, and Radio M. It operates WBEZ 91.5 FM, one of the country's premiere public radio stations, and Vocalo 89.5 FM, an experimental web/radio service that seeks to expand the reach of public media. For more information, please visit www.chicagopublicmedia.org.

About (slam location)

Columbia College Chicago is the largest and most diverse private, non-profit, arts and media college in the nation. We offer a rigorous, four-year, liberal arts curriculum specifically tailored for a creative and motivated community of students who are serious about pursuing careers in the arts. As educators we pride ourselves on our ability to not just acknowledge the importance of diversity in higher education and academic philosophy, but also on tending to its development and ensuring its place on our campus.

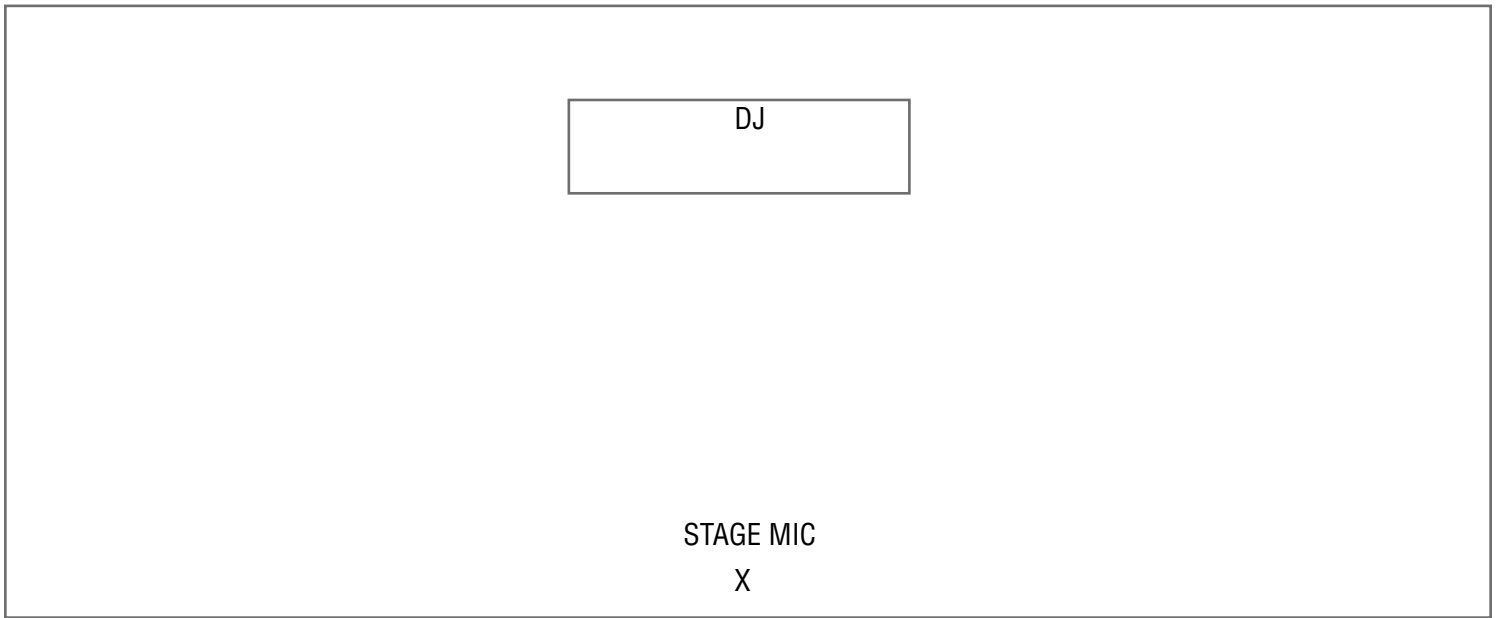
We are located in an eclectic, urban neighborhood in Chicago's historic South Loop. Close by are several other colleges and universities, Navy Pier, Adler Planetarium, the Art Institute, the Field Museum, the Chicago Symphony, the Goodman Theatre, and countless cafes, theaters, museums, clubs, libraries, shops, and businesses. Columbia actively encourages our students to utilize all of Chicago as a social, cultural, educational, and professional resource, effectively turning the entire city into our campus.

About (your organization)

Young Chicago Authors transforms the lives of young people by cultivating their voices through writing, publication, and performance education. Founded by Dr. Robert S. Boone as the Saturday Writing Program in 1991, YCA has grown in the last 20 years into such programs as SayWhat Magazine, WordPlay Open Mic, GirlSpeak and BoyThink webzines, and the Louder Than A Bomb teen poetry festival - the largest of its kind in the world. For more information, please visit youngchicagoauthors.org.

SET-UP

There are many different ways to set up the venue for the slam. LTAB Chicago has all the participating poets sit on the stage with their coaches throughout the festival. The DJ is also set up on stage. The judges are usually in the third or fourth row in the center of orchestra seating. The hosts are all off-stage and in the wings between each performance. The scorekeepers are seated in the house orchestra near the judges. Typically, LTAB Chicago will reserve seats for sponsors and key donors. Any other poets from the representing schools that maybe did not make the Slam team, i.e. poets seven, eight, nine, ten, etc, have reserved seating in the orchestra as well. Please see the diagram below for venue set-up.



X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	(RESERVED SEATS FOR YOUTH)
X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
				X	X	X	X	X	X	(RESERVED SEATS FOR JUDGES)

ABOUT

Bout sheets are used by the bout manager. “Bout” is a slam term that refers to one round of slam poetry. The LTAB Youth Poetry Festival is usually comprised of four “bouts”, which means the festival will include four rounds of poetry performance—although a slam can have more bouts than four. A “bout manager” organizes each round of performances in the festival. Other persons involved in helping to manage the bouts are a scorekeeper and timekeeper. The scorekeeper maintains a running total of all the points scored by individuals and teams. The scorekeeper works with the timekeeper to make deductions to scores as needed. The timekeeper uses a stop watch to make sure the poems performed stick within the allotted three-minute time frame. If the poet goes over time, point will be docked from their overall score. To keep things organized, teams are given letters to designate their sequence in the bout. See the following materials for more details on the tasks. For your convenience, we’ve included an example of what a “bout” sheet might look like.

SCOREKEEPER/TIMEKEEPER/BOUT MANAGER

Bout Manager (1): _____

Scorekeepers (1 to 2): _____

Timekeepers (1 to 2): _____

TEAMS

Team A Team B Team C Team D

ROUNDS

ABCD BCDA CDAB DABC

Order chosen by cumulative scores of teams (lowest to highest) in both indie and team rounds.

ROUND 1

Team A: _____

Team B: _____

Team C: _____

Team D: _____

ROUND 2

Team B: _____

Team C: _____

Team D: _____

Team A: _____

ROUND 3

Team C: _____

Team D: _____

Team A: _____

Team B: _____

ROUND 4

Team D: _____

Team A: _____

Team B: _____

Team C: _____

INITIATING THE JUDGES

As one of the final steps in preparing for the slam, the following rules are read to the judges – not the audience—before the festival begins:

A designated organizer will prepare LTAB judges for their part in the slam festival. When thinking about who to select as judges, make sure you do not select anyone that has a vested interest or relationship with the schools/teams performing in the festival. Be creative when thinking about who you might want to judge. LTAB Chicago has invited the Chicago Cultural Commissioner, Executive Director of Jane-Addams Hull House, award-winning authors, award-winning poets, movie stars, and more to participate. Be strategic when selecting judges. If there are stakeholders you are courting for sponsorship support, consider inviting them as active members in the slam.

Make sure judges arrive at least 30 minutes before the slam begins so they can receive instruction and get situated in their seats.

Once the judges have checked-in and are at their designated seats, read the following instructions to them. These instructions are not to be read to the audience.

“Anyone is qualified to be a judge, just create your poetic value system and stick to it. We ask LTAB judges to rate from a score of 6 to 10 using one decimal place. It doesn’t matter how high or low your scores are centered just that you remain consistent in your scoring. The emphasis should very much be on the poetry and the written word, but performance and personal subjectivity play a part. Don’t let the audience jubilation or derision sway your scoring. Thank you.”

INITIATING THE AUDIENCE

At slam poetry festivals, audience participation is just as important as the performance on stage. The festival host will read the following rules at the start of the slam in order to prepare your audience.

1. Slam is a poetry competition. It was invented in 1984 by Chicagoan Marc Smith. In the last twenty-five years, poetry slam has spread throughout the US and world. Louder Than a Bomb was started in 2001 by Chicago-based poets – Kevin Coval and Anna West. What started with a couple of teams has now blossomed into the largest youth poetry slam in the world.
2. Here’s how it works: poets will read their work and be judged by five judges. The poems are scored on a scale from 1-10, with one decimal point. We drop the highest and lowest score and add the middle three scores. Judges evaluate both the poet’s performance and the content of the poems. A score of “1” is for a poem that should’ve never been written and “10” is a mind busting, face melting, Pulitzer prize winning literary piece of unbelievable brilliance! (Ad lib here).
3. We will have four indie rounds, and one group piece round, where four poets appear onstage together, performing their group poem.
4. Poems must be three minutes or less. Poems longer than three minutes will result in a deduction in score. No cursing or racist, homophobic, or gender-biased language is allowed. Points are deducted if these rules are broken.
5. Let’s meet the judges:

THE JUDGES

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Encourage the audience to let the judges know how you feel they are doing!

6. Alright this is about to get real...Before we start the bout, we need to have a poet or two come up and calibrate the judges. This “sacrificial poet” will get the judges warmed up for the bout.

- *Sac Poet* _____ *from* _____
- *Sac Poet* _____ *from* _____

THANKING THE SPONSORS

Publicly acknowledging your sponsors is an important task for the host of the festival. Prior to the day of the slam ensure that you and your team have thought through the names of all key sponsors. Write them down for the host of the festival. The host will insert thank you's throughout the festival. The following is an example from LTAB-Tulsa.

1. This year's Louder Than a Bomb is presented by WILLIAMS a primary sponsor WILLIAMS has a long tradition of being a responsible corporate citizen with a commitment to our community and we thank them! Additional funders include the Irvin & Sharna Frank Foundation, PSO, OU-Tulsa, the Human Relations Student Association, the OU-Tulsa Student Association, TCC, TU, and KIND viewers like you! (Invite applause).
2. LTAB-Tulsa is one of the few remaining non-profit organizations left in this economy and it relies on the generosity of its patrons to keep this program alive. And next year we anticipate many more schools and organizations becoming involved! If you would like to make a donation to Louder Than a Bomb-Tulsa, the LTAB-T foundation account will accept a check or cash, just wave down Kent Martin.
3. Thank you to Tulsa Community College, offering programs in all areas of the arts, we are thrilled to have the Louder Than a Bomb-Tulsa's Preliminary Rounds in the Center for Creativity. Visit www.tulsacc.edu to find out more about TCC- and please respect their space!
4. LTAB-T is a not only a competition but a poetry festival. We dare you to come out to the other spoken word events offered in Tulsa, like Confidence Omenai's Psalms and Soul Food and Miko White's Say Somethin Sundays! As well as events throughout the year down at the Living Arts!
5. Slam FINALS are on Saturday February 11th at the beautiful, brand new LORTON PERFORMANCE CENTER AUDITORIUM on the University of Tulsa Campus at 550 S. Gary Place - beginning at 12:30pm and lasting until 5pm. It's going to be an amazing festival day, emceed by Tim Stafford and Nate Marshall from Chicago with performances by Just Move Dance, local all-star performers, and of course our outstanding LTAB-T Teams.

SCORE SHEET

10:00am	Thur 2/23/12	BOUT 1	Conaway
Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Team 4
member 1	member 1	member 1	member 1
member 2	member 2	member 2	member 2
member 3	member 3	member 3	member 3
member 4	member 4	member 4	member 4
member 5	member 5	member 5	member 5
member 6	member 6	member 6	member 6

Write In The Team Names From Draw Order Here:

A	B
C	D
Indy Poet 1	0 _____
Indy Poet 2	0 _____
Indy Poet 3	0 _____

ROUND ONE

TEAM Name A>	Poet Name	SCORE
TEAM Name B>	Poet Name	SCORE
TEAM Name C>	Poet Name	SCORE
TEAM Name D>	Poet Name	SCORE
Indy Poet		SCORE

ROUND TWO

TEAM Name B>	Poet Name	SCORE
TEAM Name C>	Poet Name	SCORE
TEAM Name D>	Poet Name	SCORE
TEAM Name A>	Poet Name	SCORE
Indy Poet		SCORE

ROUND THREE

TEAM Name C>	Poet Name	SCORE
TEAM Name D>	Poet Name	SCORE
TEAM Name A>	Poet Name	SCORE
TEAM Name B>	Poet Name	SCORE
Indy Poet		SCORE

ROUND FOUR

TEAM Name D>	Poet Name	SCORE
TEAM Name A>	Poet Name	SCORE
TEAM Name B>	Poet Name	SCORE
TEAM Name C>	Poet Name	SCORE
Indy Poet		SCORE

SCORE SHEET

Rank/Cumulative Scores for Rounds 1-4:

Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Team 4
/	/	/	/

Group Piece Round (order determined by the placings after rounds 1-4)

Team Ranked 4th Name>	SCORE
Team Ranked 3rd Name>	SCORE
Team Ranked 2nd Name>	SCORE
Team Ranked 1st Name>	SCORE

End of Bout (Rank/Cumulative Score)

Team 1	Team 2	Team 3	Team 4
/	/	/	/

GENERAL INFORMATION

This DJ Guide was created in response to the decade-long work of DJ Itch 13 – aka Justin Dawson—LTAB Chicago’s official DJ. The following elements include his artistic approaches to mixing at the slam.

Musical accompaniment should occur during three parts of the festival: (1) when the house opens to the audience (usually 30 minutes before the slam begins); (2) for the duration of the festival; and (3) for the period of time after the festival is over (usually 30 minutes after the slam ends).

During the slam be sure to play music on a lower volume all through the times when Hosts are talking-- this includes the introduction of slam rules, the judges, poets, scores, etc. By playing music at times of instruction, or during transition, the energy of the audience and poets will stay consistent throughout the event. The volume should be turned up during times of transition when no one is speaking.

**The general rule is: The only time you are not playing music is when a poet is performing.

LICENSING

If you are capturing video documentation of the festival, please note all music featured in the footage needs to include a license agreement. To assuage this issue, LTAB Chicago dubs over the music and just features the poetry. The music heard in the LTAB film was created by a fellow poet who gave Siskel and Jacobs Production “rights to use”.

AESTHETIC

One of the two key elements making Itch’s spinning so fresh is his ability to respond musically to the poems performed on stage. Here is how he does it:

While a poet is performing he listens to the tone of their performance, and finds music to either speak back to it or further capture the essence aesthetically.

Please see the following two examples below that outline the specifics of how he works.

CONTENT

The first way Itch creates a synergy between the poet and the audience is by responding to the essence of the student's poem. While the student is performing he pays attention to the tone of the poem and then responds to it abstractly.

EXAMPLE

- A. Rachel Smith performs, "Hallelujah the Saviors are Here". The first line in her poem is, "We can save them, I still believe. Cry the saviors riding in on their steeds...trying to rescue us urban kidz."
- B. Itch plays, the chorus of Real Life's song "Send Me an Angel".
- C. Smith's poem is not about angels, but rather discusses the colonial approaches to pedagogy that negatively dominate Chicago's cultural and school districts. Itch's choice to use "Send Me an Angel" becomes a counterpart and thereby harmonizes with the sarcasm in her voice.

CONTENT

A second way Itch carries the crowd musically is by responding to the content in the student's poem.

During a performance he quickly summarizes the narrative conveyed and finds a song that responds to the content of the story being told.

EXAMPLE

- A. Malcolm London performs, "Why You Talk Like That." The first line in his poem is, "Why you talk like that with fake bass in your voice. Like you got foundation. Why you talk like that. Speak up. Police I lights on street posts. Up."
- B. Itch plays, BBU's, "The Hood" from the album bell hooks.
- C. London's poem is about the binary between dialect and stereotypes. The content of his poem and the lyrics of the song complement one another linearly.

SLAM AWARD(S)

Every year LTAB Chicago provides multiple awards to young people who have demonstrated the highest quality of writing in areas of: form, style, content, and team spirit. Three awards are usually given out: (1) “Chuck D Political Terrorist Award” for strongest political content, (2) “LTAB Artistic Excellence Award” for strongest attention to form and style, and (3) “Spirit of the Slam Award” given to an individual or team who has done an excellent job de-emphasizing the competition and emphasizing support for the community of writers. These awards work for Chicago. Be creative and thoughtful, and acknowledge the great work being produced by your young people in your city. Acknowledge their strengths through a series of awards. The following certificate is an example of the “Spirit of the Slam Award”.

place logos here

**LOUDER THAN A BOMB-TULSA, YOUNG
CHICAGO AUTHORS AND OU-TULSA PRESENT**

spirit of the slam award

NAME OF POET

COACH'S NAMES

TEACHER'S NAME

ORGANIZER'S NAME

A

Authentic Youth Voice	The distinct and genuine attitudes, ideas, opinions, knowledge and actions of young people both individually and as a collective body.
------------------------------	--

B

Bottom-up approach	An approach that is directed and organized from a ground level.
---------------------------	---

C

Counter Narrative	Stories constructed in order to provide alternatives to – and therefore resist – dominant narratives. Through telling and retelling, counter-narratives attempt to shake the perception of dominant narratives as essential, intrinsic or “natural” to the culture.
Counter-Public	An arena composed of members of a subordinated social group (or groups) designed to serve as an alternative space for discourse; counter-publics both disrupt the idea of a neutral “public sphere,” by demonstrating the ways in which larger public discourse privileges certain voices over others, and offer a corrective by allowing subordinated groups to create and make use of new or repurposed terms and narratives to describe and process their experiences.
Cultural citizen	A “citizen” defined not only in the narrow legal sense of possessing the rights, privileges and responsibilities assigned to a person who belongs to a state, but in the broader sense of relating emotionally and politically with a given culture, which may have an allied, resistant, oppositional or mixed relationship to the state. Allowing for the idea of “cultural citizenship” creates space for comparison between the nominal rights official citizenship and the unofficial ties and affiliations which result in unequal enforcement and honoring of those rights in relation to different populations within the state.
Community of practice	A group of people who make a conscious decision to learn and work collectively in an area of common interest on an ongoing basis. Louder Than A Bomb is a festival and a competition; its participants, however, are also meant to function as an ongoing community of practice, supporting and learning from one another and connecting around the idea of poetry as critical discourse.
Cultural literacy	The knowledge base of cultural, social, historical or other informational context that students need access to in order to effectively understand and engage with what they read. All writing and literature is produced within a culture and within a context; where “literacy” is the ability to read in a practical or mechanical sense and “reading comprehension” is the ability to extract information from what is read, “cultural literacy” is the context students need to make sense of that information and relate it to their world
Critical reflection	The practice of thinking critically about one’s own culture; questioning norms and practices rather than treating them as self-evident in order to develop a more nuanced understanding of how the culture operates in relation to the various experiences of its members and to experiences within and across other cultures.

Critical pedagogy	A radical perspective on, and practice of, teaching that seeks to realize the potential of education to open dominant and oppressive ideologies to examination, and by so doing create space for resistant and emancipatory thinking. In critical pedagogy, this goal informs teaching at all theoretical, methodological and practical levels (rather than simply the curricular level) in order to question and rethink oppressive practices within pedagogy itself.
E	
Engagement	In an educational context, engagement refers to a student’s experience and practice of connecting to learning. “Engaged pedagogy” aims to create an educational environment that encourages democratic, self-directed, experience-and-community-based and reflective student activity.
H	
Hip Hop pedagogy	An educational praxis which most often uses the tenets and methods of critical pedagogy as its basis, and is specifically informed by multiple aspects of hip-hop: hip-hop artists and works themselves as teaching tools, hip-hop philosophy and organizing as pedagogical guidelines, and hip-hop culture as a way of establishing and legitimizing students’ personal experiences and tastes in the classroom. Hip-hop pedagogy in practice can take several forms: hip-hop arts such as MCing, breakdancing, DJ-ing and graffiti arts can be directly taught or examined in class or workshop form. Hip-hop techniques and keystones such as remixing, verse journalism, rhythm innovation, and cultural critique can be used as techniques for student work in classes not necessarily directly related to hip-hop as a genre. Finally, hip-hop works (songs, artworks, dances, books, etc) can be used as teaching tools and modes of student outreach in classes in any discipline by selecting works with themes and techniques relevant to the subject matter.
Hip Hop poetry	Poetry influenced and informed by, and often grounded in, the aesthetics of hip-hop music and culture. This can include use of rhythm and rhyme, including in some cases the use of beats or other accompaniment. It can also include an emphasis on spoken performance that allows room for improvisation, rather than treating poems as static documents whose main life occurs on the page. Hip-Hop Poetry also encompasses the classification of hip-hop song lyrics as poetry in and of themselves.
I	
Immersion Pedagogy	A teaching practice that emphasizes students’ direct experience of their surrounding environment as the basis for learning. This emphasis creates an atmosphere of direct inquiry, and allows teachers to structure their teaching around the immediate needs, interests, responses and learning styles of their students.
Incubating Institution	In business, an incubating institution is an organization or company that serves to provide startups with resources and in some cases initial funding, to help get promising ventures off the ground. At Young Chicago Authors, we also talk about YCA and LTAB as “incubating institutions” for young talent, connecting young poets and writers with mentors, support systems, and the work of both established poets and their own peers, and providing them with a space in which they can develop themselves and find opportunities to share and grow their work.
Initiated audience	A viewing or listening public with an at-minimum introductory level of familiarity with the conventions of a performance genre or event; the majority of theater, dance, and visual arts audiences, for example, are “initiated”: they are repeat viewers of artistic performance and have some idea what to expect. It’s important to cultivate, support and grow initiated audiences for poetry and spoken word events, and arts events in general, as part of the process of supporting and maintaining arts organizations.

L

Level-one engagement	The introductory level for YCA and Louder Than A Bomb’s work: one-time introductory engagements (usually workshops) using fairly broad and general topics that pull directly from the identity of the community. The “Where I’m From” workshop is the most prominent example of a Level-One Engagement. At this level there is no critical feedback for participants; all feedback is positive and encouraging.
Level-two engagement	The second level of work, usually an ongoing (or, at least, more than one-session) engagement with part of its focus on forming and engaging with a community. Level-Two is project based, with a final goal, often some kind of public reading or presentation. At this level we begin to offer constructive critical feedback while maintaining an emphasis on positivity and encouragement.
Level-three engagement	The level of individual mentoring and instruction. Mentors work with individual mentees on their particular challenges, and, through their knowledge of those challenges, along with the mentees’ voices, strengths and interests, are able to push them in individualized directions. These mentees are not only engaged with the community built through Level-Two engagements but also become mouthpieces and advocates for that community, helping sustain it and ideally becoming mentors themselves.
Louder Than a Bomb	A youth poetry festival and competition, begun in Chicago in 2002 by Anna West and Kevin Coval, named after Public Enemy’s “Louder Than A Bomb,” from their album It Takes a Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back. The original Louder Than A Bomb is in its twelfth year and brings together youth across Chicago every spring to write, perform and compete. Louder Than A Bomb festivals are emerging in cities and states across the nation, led by local organizations working closely with Young Chicago Authors to create a nationwide Louder Than A Bomb network. New Louder Than A Bomb festivals include LTAB Tulsa, LTAB Michigan, LTAB Massachusetts, and LTAB Omaha.
LTAB methodology	The practices and principles that shape and inform programming are fundamentally related to intentional community organizing—a deliberate process where a group of persons mobilize in order to act in their shared self-interest.
LTAB pedagogy	The practices and principles that shape and inform Louder Than A Bomb teaching and instruction. Emphasized among these are the creation of creative community and safe space (for a definition of “safe space,” this handout from the National Youth Leadership Network website is useful: www.nyln.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/PandA.pdf), where students are able to move outside their comfort zones in a democratic environment. Louder Than A Bomb is dedicated to providing this type of environment to all participants, not only by creating a community open to everyone, but by actively seeking out and including people and groups who are often left out or difficult to reach because of marginalization or lack of opportunity.

M

Multiple publics	A teaching practice that emphasizes students’ direct experience of their surrounding environment as the basis for learning. This emphasis creates an atmosphere of direct inquiry, and allows teachers to structure their teaching around the immediate needs, interests, responses and learning styles of their students.
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O

Orality	The quality of being spoken or verbally communicated; preference for or tendency to use spoken forms of language.
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P

Pedagogy	The art and science of teaching. LTAB’s teaching is rooted in critical and public instruction. (See definitions for ‘critical pedagogy’ and ‘public pedagogy’).
Personal agency	An individual’s capacity, condition, or state of acting or of exerting power through with an end is achieved.
Poet-journalists	A poet who uses the methods of journalistic research to investigate and explore the world they live in—these new knowledges find their way into the poetry writing and performed. Some of these methods are rooted in information-gathering such as conducting interviews and engaging in research.
Polyculturalism	Subject of the 2001 book Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity by Vijay Prashad, polyculturalism asserts that all of the world’s cultures are interrelated. This idea is opposed to the concept of multiculturalism, which its supporters argue is divisive.
Praxis	The act of engaging, applying, and exercising ideas, lessons, or theory.
Professional development	Professional Development—referred to as “PD”—fosters collective responsibility for improved artistic and educational performance and is comprised of professional learning that occurs several times a year.
Progressive programming	Programming that occurs gradually or in stages; this process related directly to Lev Vygotsky’s notions of “scaffolding”.
Public pedagogy	A term coined by Henry Giroux to describe the nature of new media, and the political and educational force of global culture.
Public platforms	Places, means, or opportunities in civic arenas used by public speakers or performers so that they can be seen and heard by their audiences.

R

Radical democracy	The belief that oppressive power relations which exist in society should be made visible, re-negotiated and altered. An ideology articulated by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in their book Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics.
Resource broker	A person who negotiates the resource needs for an organization or project, and ensures that the necessary supplies are available to complete objectives.

S

Seed funds	Also known as seed money, seed funds are provided by one or more parties to assist in the generation of a new enterprise.
Slam	A poetry competition where poets read or recite original work and are judged on a numeric scale by a select group of members from the audience. Marc Smith, a blue collar worker from Chicago, is credited with starting the slam at the Get Me High Lounge on November 1984.
Stakeholders	A person, group, or organization that has direct or indirect stake in an organization because it can affect or be affected by the organization’s actions, objectives, and policies.

Strategic partnership	An informal or formal alliance between two enterprises, use formalized by one or more business contracts.
T	
Top-down approach	An approach that is controlled, directed, or organized from the top.

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