LEGO Art

Advisor: Jim Braband

In collaboration with the Boys and Girls Club
1.0 Abstract

The goal of LEGO Art was to create a non-profit art organization for inner city youth. This organization was to address the number of budget cuts of art programs in Chicago, in which funding is currently one third of what it was a decade ago. LEGO Art would focus on building the self-esteem of young inner city students, as well as recognizing their works. LEGO Art was defined as a field of art in which students could translate a 2-d concept into a 3-d sculpture through the use of LEGO’s.

In the spring 2011 semester, the IPRO 361 team coordinated a pilot program of LEGO Art in collaboration with the Louis L. Valentine Boys and Girls Club. A 10-day LEGO Art curriculum was created with guidance from the Math and Science Educational Department at IIT, and in alignment with Illinois State Standards. Additionally, grant research, strategies for sponsors, and a sustainability plan were accomplished to continue LEGO Art into future semesters as it expands. The creation of a website (legoart.org) along with an Exhibition Gallery opening promoted the goal of student recognition and building self-esteem.

In the fall 2011 semester, the IPRO team will expand the program around Chicago as well as create innovative strategies to sustain it. The IPRO will also seek new ways to interact with these communities to promote LEGO Art.

2.0 Background and Objective

In 2000, the Illinois Arts Council Budget was an estimated 21.9 million dollars. In 2010, the current budget is 7.8 million dollars, an approximate third of what it was a decade ago. Along with this statistic, there are currently over 100 gangs in Chicago and less than 20 non-profit art organizations. LEGO Art seeks to counter these statistics and create a new art style for young inner city students.

The purpose of this project is to open the necessary channels of communication and to gather after-school initiatives to facilitate LEGO Art. The IPRO 361 vision is creating a community of young artists in whose works are recognized throughout the community.

Spring 2011 Goals:
- Define the term LEGO Art
- Coordinate a Pilot Program with the Boys and Girls Club
- Gain support from local sponsors
- Apply/write/research proposals for grants and funding
- Develop a website including a “virtual gallery”
- Find support from local artists, youth participants, and community volunteers
- Create plans for sustaining the program into future semesters
- Create metrics for success of the program
- Coordinate a final exhibition gallery to promote recognition and self-esteem of the youth
- Reserve locations around the community to display the LEGO Art sculptures
3.0 Organization and Approach

The LEGO Art group had to be organized into 3 different sub-teams in order to achieve its goals; educational development, funding and sustainability, and recognizing individuals. A GAANT chart was created in the beginning of the semester to have a documented schedule of tasks for each sub-team. Additionally, a weekly status report was compiled every Tuesday that listed the accomplished per member to hold individuals accountable. A team bonding session created a more open atmosphere in the classroom for feedback as well as members becoming familiar with the process of designing LEGO Art sculptures.

The educational development sub-team focused on the development of the LEGO Art curriculum, starting by defining LEGO Art. Much research toward similar programs and activities had to be done in order to differentiate our program from the competition. Additionally, the sub-team led in coordinating the pilot program and evaluating and collecting data.

The funding and sustainability sub-team lead started the semester with grant writing and research as well as researching potential sponsors. The sub-team also had to research materials specifics that matched with the curriculum that the ED sub-team complied. A website was also developed under this sub-team, making it easier to describe to potential supporters and busy parents what the LEGO Art entails.

The recognition sub-team focused on strategies for recognizing and building self-esteem in these younger students. The virtual gallery allowed for the students hard work to be recognized easily. Much research was also done on effective ways to recognize and reward children. The sub-team also sought a variety of media’s to promote LEGO Art. A final exhibition was also planned with innovative trophies after the pilot program was accomplished.

4.0 Analysis and Findings

As the pilot program of LEGO Art was executed with the Boys and Girls Club (March 28th - April 8th), we found the program to be very successful. As all members of IPRO 361 became IRB certified, we found it to be very helpful in ethical treatment of these younger students. The program director, Dawn Jimenez, stated that the BGCC had previously had a LEGO club; however, it was very unsuccessful. However, she added the LEGO Art program IPRO 361 proposed was more structured and has become one of their most successful programs:

“I feel that this particular program was very rewarding for the youth. They got more than just play out of the program. They received basic knowledge on architecture, math, science, and they also got to experience being involved with younger adults who actually care about their future. I did see the youth become more creative and whatever project they chose, from what I have seen, they really stick to their guns and made it happen so I think that shows a lot of dedication to the program.” –Dawn Jimenez

The structure of the curriculum and emphasis on the development of math and science skills had made the program educationally successful. The freedom and independency of the final project became very successful in promoting the creativity of the youth students. It was these successes that lead to the commitment of the Boys and Girls Club to continue the program in the future.
The curriculum developed by the ED sub-team was found to be too rigorous in the first phases of the program. The instructions developed by the LEGO Digital Design were too difficult and too long for the children in the program. Thus, the curriculum was redeveloped to address these difficulties.

The website was very successful in term of not only getting LEGO Art exposed, but making the program more legitimate to potential supporters. I believe that the easy and quick donations link will make it more persuasive for donors to support the program.

The gallery exhibition was one of the best strategies to communicate with the children, their parents, and supports to gain feedback on the program. The family bonding session of scrapbooking was another successful method of building self-esteem within these young children as their parents interacted with them. The gallery event also gave potential supporters an introductory stepping stone into sponsoring LEGO Art, as Connie’s Pizza, Mother Butters Popcorn, and Jimmy John’s donated to the gallery exhibition. The innovative trophies developed in the idea shop also gave the young students a lot of excitement as they would be able to play with the trophy and continue their creativity even after the program was done.

The sustainability plan will need to update and change as semesters continue and the IPRO team changes. The grant research must be implemented as LEGO Art expands. As we had one local artist (D. Brokamp) support LEGO Art this semester, it will be very important to gain support from art shops and artists in Chicago to promote LEGO Art.

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

Even though the IPRO 361 accomplished much this semester, this was only the beginning phases of LEGO Art achieving its overall goals of having sustainable afterschool art programs throughout Chicago. Even though the current curriculum follows many Illinois State Standards, it may need more activities related to the math and sciences for schools to accept it. The LEGO Art program, however, may expand throughout other Boys and Girls Clubs around Chicago due to the target users and their willingness to continue the program.

Additionally, as expansion happens into the following semester, many volunteers will be needed to teach the program. With that, training sessions and documents will be needed for these volunteers. Potential sponsors may also want an interaction with the actual program as well.

The website will be a very important component as it has become a template for the community to recognize LEGO Art. I believe as the upcoming semester continue, the virtual gallery will need to be edited more to describe the individualism of each student as well as promotion through media.

One of the most important things I believe LEGO Art will need in the upcoming semester is solid documentation of metrics before and after the LEGO Art program is executed. This will entail numerous data and testimonials on paper in order to supplement real data to support our goals and missions. Additionally, this data would be great support for grant writing and to potential business supporters.

Overall, the IPRO 361 team was efficient and accomplished many, if not all, the goals sought out to accomplish this semester. The success of this team came from the motivation to help the community, the honesty and respect for fellow teammates, and the accountability of each individual. The structure of the three sub-teams kept the IPRO organized and efficient week to week.
6.0 Acknowledgements and References

Thank you to the Boys and Girls Club and their program director, Dawn Jimenez, for the opportunity to work with them. Additional thanks to Kim at the BGCC for her contributions as an art teacher in helping our cause.

IPRO 361 website: www.legoart.org
Appendix A: Team Structure

Appendix B: Budget

LEGO Bricks: $900
Gallery Event Materials: $50
Acrylic Trophies: $90
Website: $10
Curriculum Paper: $100
Invitations and Brochures: $100

*refer to J. Luciani at the IdeaShop for more specific list

*Refer to Sustainability Report for contacts, background data, resources, and references