

# Quest to Learn School for digital kids

## **INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS**

In 2006 the MacArthur Foundation turned their attention to the design of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environments that would respond both to the needs of kids growing up in a digital, information-rich, globally complex era prizing creativity, innovation, and resourcefulness. As part of this work, in spring 2007 New Visions for Public Schools joined forces with Katie Salen (Center for Transformative Media, Parsons The New School for Design and The Institute of Play, a games and learning group), with an idea for a school that would use “game-like learning” as a way to empower and engage students from all walks of life. Quest to Learn (Q2L) is the result of this collaboration, and is specific in its focus on connecting student learning to the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, supporting young people in their learning across digital networks, peer communities, content, careers, and media.

Critically, the school design has drawn on youth development literature about the environmental factors that greatly increase student resiliency and improve the chances for academic and social success of youth living in high-risk environments. These factors include high expectations of students’ abilities and skills; participation in activities that engage their voluntary commitment; opportunities to make contributions and to have these recognized and assessed; and continuity of support. Significantly, these factors are the very things that make games and other forms of digital media so compelling to young people today. The school’s institutional partners—The Institute of Play, The New School, Pearson and Pearson Foundation—will offer teachers and students unprecedented access to new kinds of learning tools to support student achievement, performance-based assessment, youth identity development, and preparation for college and/or career, including support for ELL, special education, and students who come into the school not academically prepared.

This unique set of partnerships will enable Quest to Learn to thrive and meet its goal of ensuring success for every student. The Institute of Play (anchor partner),

The New School (research partner), and Pearson/Pearson Foundation (corporate partner) will provide Q2L with curricular resources, professional development expertise, grounding in a local community, and intern/career/service learning opportunities for students in all grade levels. This triad of partners will each play a different role (*as described below*) in sustaining and supporting Q2L's learning community, and are committed to working with the school long-term.

### **The Institute of Play**

Founded in 2006 the Institute of Play (IoP) is a non-profit that supports design and research in the area of games and learning. It is a research-based, youth-oriented organization that designs game-based learning environments, curriculum, and professional development programs centered on helping teachers gain fluency in the effective use of digital media and games for learning. The Institute of Play is staffed by professional game designers and leading researchers in the fields of game-based pedagogy, new media literacies, the learning sciences, assessment, and youth development. In addition, IoP is a member of the MacArthur Foundation digital media and learning research network.

Over the past several years, The Institute of Play, in partnership with the MacArthur Foundation, Hewlett, Intel, and others has mobilized interest and support from some of the most cutting edge researchers and practitioners from around the country in the area of games, learning, and assessment. They are a recognized leader in game-based curriculum development and a thought leader in the area of new learning models informed by the digital world of kids. IoP has established a number of core research partnerships to support Quest to Learn, most pressingly in the area of data and assessment, including work with Dan Schwartz (Stanford), Bob Mislevy (Univ. Maryland), and Valerie Shute (Florida State), Jim Gee and Alice Robison (Arizona State University) in the area of literacy and writing, Nichole Pinkard (Univ. of Chicago) and Henry Jenkins (MIT) in the area of new media literacies and professional development, Meg Meyer (Univ. of Wisconsin Madison) in the area of mathematics, and Tony Bryk (Carnegie Center for the Advancement of Teaching) in the area of organizational systems.

The Institute of Play also has close ties with numerous leaders in the game and media industry including Will Wright (EA/Maxis), Warren Spector (Ion Storm/Disney), Kenny Miller (Viacom), Raph Koster (Sony Online), and Cory Ondrejka (Second Life/EMI). These individuals are respected as true innovators embodying the kinds of skills Q2L aims to instill in its students. Through a corporate mentorship program that will provide students with access to software, internships, and industry mentors these leaders and others will make their presence felt daily, a core piece of our CTE efforts. In addition, the Institute has strong relationships with design and media companies like MTV Networks, Nickelodeon, RGA Interactive, IDEO, Frog Design, and Curious Pictures, all who will participate in Q2L's intern and apprenticeship program, *DaVinci's Lab*.

Recently, the Institute of Play co-received a \$500,000 grant from the MacArthur Foundation to develop game-based learning models for SMALLab, a mixed reality modeling and simulation lab designed by David Birchfield of ASU. SMALLab allows students to interact in a full-bodied way with digital projections in a collaborative, inquiry-based context. An additional \$285,000 from Intel will support research into new assessment models. This funding will allow IoP to bring SMALLab into the school as one learning and assessment space among many supporting students and teachers in their quest to learn.

To date, the Institute of Play has been responsible for building the school development team, providing research support, curriculum and assessment expertise, and piloting models for the school as part of the school design process. Its work has been driven by a rigorous design process that has resulted in a design plan that describes in detail a research-based learning and instructional model, curricular structures and maps, assessment strategies and models, hiring procedures, scheduling, community outreach, student and teacher profiles, foundational research in school reform and the learning sciences, student and teacher schedules, etc.

A month-long Summer Teacher's Institute in 2008 brought a small group of 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade NYC public school teachers together to collaborate with game designers and curriculum specialists at IoP, as a way to evaluate the effectiveness of Q2L's

professional development and curriculum model. The teams developed curricular units (called “Missions” within our instructional model) using the Q2L instructional model. *(Sample units can be downloaded at [www.instituteofplay.org](http://www.instituteofplay.org) > Summer Teachers Institute)*

The pilots have demonstrated the speed at which teachers who have little previous experience with game-based learning and systems-thinking can pick up the model and begin to innovate within it. They also proved, via the units developed, how deeply teachers are able to engage content and standards within Quest to Learn’s learning model, how well the model supports differentiated instruction for students, and how strongly the model supports authentic assessment. As one Social Studies teacher remarked during a post-Institute interview, “By distilling my unit down to a set of core ideas my students can go deep into the content. Everything flows together and I can really see my students building knowledge as they go.” An ELA teacher remarked that the “rigor of the model really made me reflect on the ideas I was trying to teach.” A third, a CTT teacher said, “The use of game elements is really going to motivate the kids. I now see so many ways to adapt it to the different learning styles in our class.” Lessons learned for the design team and our ongoing process include an ongoing emphasis on collaboration between teachers and the game designers at the Institute of Play, not just in the planning phases but also during implementation. Continued work around integrating more traditional assessment tools, like quizzes and exams, with the kinds of embedded, authentic assessment our model allows will be needed as well, will be studied in the second phase of pilots, planned for Spring 2008.

Thus far, the overall process has enabled The Institute of Play to develop a number of resources for use in Q2L, including curriculum and teaching guides, standards-based games, an Afterschool program focused on helping kids develop robust literacy practices around a range of digital media platforms, and a team-based professional development program that pairs teachers with game designers to create curriculum for the school. The process has also been marked by a strong desire to create materials that account for differentiated instruction and the needs of English language learners.

Through its strong ties on both a local and national level to a community of teachers and researchers interested in research-driven approaches to learning, IoP can provide Quest to Learn with many of the necessary resources to help it succeed. On a day-to-day level the IoP will play a key role in supporting both students and teachers, in the following ways:

1. As part of the pilot programs, participating teachers were asked to complete pre- and post-Institute surveys and were interviewed at the completion of the summer Institute. We will continue to gather data from teachers as they implement the units they developed in their classrooms during fall 2008.
2. IoP will run Mission Lab, a working game design, assessment, program evaluation, and curriculum development space physically situated within the school, in collaboration with its key partners. Members of the IoP staff will be on site each day to work with students and teachers, providing opportunities to work with game designers and other media specialists on professional development and curriculum projects.
3. The Institute in accordance with Q2L's team-based curriculum development model will provide daily professional development support for teachers. This includes 1-on-1 meetings, grade level meetings, and domain meetings between teachers and game design experts and learning scientists from IoP.
4. The Institute will offer design internships and electives, starting in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, to give students opportunities to experience career and academic pathways within design, technology, and media fields.

### **The New School**

The New School is a legendary, progressive university comprising eight schools bound by a common, unusual intent: to prepare and inspire its 9,400 undergraduate and graduate students to bring actual, positive change to the world. From its Greenwich Village campus, The New School launches economists and actors, fashion designers and urban planners, dancers and anthropologists, orchestra conductors, filmmakers, political scientists, organizational experts, jazz musicians, scholars, psychologists, historians, journalists, and above all, world citizens- individuals whose ideas and innovations forge new paths of progress in the arts,

design, humanities, public policy, and the social sciences. The New School will support Quest to Learn in the following ways:

1. Space: The New School will work to provide Q2L with access to technology labs, auditoriums, galleries, and community-meeting spaces, as needed during an incubation period;
2. Center for Transformative Media: this new research center will support the development of new tools and applications for use in the school, per the goals of its curriculum, and will also provide opportunities for students to work on game development and emerging technology projects with the Center's staff of industry fellows and research partners.
3. Teacher Certification program in digital media and game-based learning: The New School has plans to launch a new teaching certification program in 2010, focused on educating teachers for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with a digital media and game-based learning focus. This program will attract students who may already have backgrounds in design and technology, and who are looking to become teachers. As a resource for Q2L this new program is significant, acting both as a context for professional development and as a pipeline for future Q2L teachers.

### **Pearson and Pearson Foundation**

Pearson is an international media company with world-leading businesses in education, business information, and consumer publishing. In recent years, they have transformed what they do, focusing on "education in the broadest sense of the word", embracing technology to change the way that people learn. They bring together some of the most valuable brands in publishing: the Financial Times, Penguin, Dorling Kindersley, Scott Foresman, Prentice Hall, Addison Wesley and Longman. From their roots as the world's largest book publisher, Pearson has grown to provide a range of related services: testing and learning software for students of all ages; data for financial institutions; public information systems for government departments.

As Q2L's corporate partner, Pearson is uniquely positioned to support Quest to Learn in the following ways on a day-to-day level:

1. The Pearson Foundation will support Q2L as one of four national Centers of Excellence, specifically providing the school with resources to run its Digital Youth Network, an Afterschool program targeting youth development via design and media production;
2. A small Pearson staff will be co-located on the Q2L campus, participating in our PD program, providing content, assessment, and curriculum development expertise to teachers, as needed. In addition, they will provide the school with digitally-based curricular materials as well as provide other forms of in-kind support.
3. Pearson will provide student internships in the areas of publishing, media, and education, giving students a chance to explore career and academic pathways.

### **New Visions for Public Schools**

New Visions for Public Schools, founded in 1989, is the largest education reform organization dedicated to improving the quality of education children receive in New York City's public schools. Working with the public and private sectors, New Visions develops programs and policies to energize teaching and learning and to raise the level of student achievement.

**For more information on Quest to Learn's Partners, please contact:**

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