Mapping Educational Ecologies

Mapping the educational ecology of a region can provide a visual representation of the range of formal and informal learning organizations. Each site hosts learning environments with the potential to trigger and/or sustain activation in learners. The case studies revealed pathways through a regional ecology where cultural and community institutions influenced trajectories into STEM and arts-related fields.

The map also highlights a wide range of STEM, arts, and youth development opportunities outside of the pathways described in the case studies. There are many organizations that have the potential to a) further enhance STEM and arts pathways of activated youth and b) collaborate to trigger and sustain activation in youth across multiple organizations.

There is an opportunity to design an educational ecology with robust art and STEM pathways for youth. All youth can be better supported within an education ecology if:

- All youth and sites are aware of resources and opportunities available in a region
- Pathway sites are aware of the alternative opportunities their participants have engaged in along their pathway
- Collaboration is supported across both formal and informal learning environments to provide enriching arts and STEM learning experiences across multiple sites

Next Steps

To magnify the existing potential of activation pathways:

- Educators and funders should deliberately build and support networks that are aware of and responsive to the interests and aspirations of youth.
- Trajectories of learning experiences should be linked in ways that support youth in taking progressive steps down an activation and learning pathway.
- As educators become more aware of the variations in function of activation pathways, the experiences they create will be more focused on outcomes that encourage the leading, priming or propelling trajectories young people may already be experiencing.

Learning environments should be designed to maximize their activation potential. Young people and their parents should be aware of existing and newly emerging opportunities at various sites for supporting activation. Individual initiative in seeking support for activation journeys should be rewarded with rich experiences that build on each other.