Structure

People sometimes describe the Computer Clubhouse learning approach as "unstructured," in contrast to the "structure" of traditional school classrooms. But that description isn't right: Clubhouses aren't unstructured; rather, they're based on a different kind of structure.

One of the keys to the Clubhouse approach is allowing kids to work on projects that they really care about. Clubhouse members should have the freedom to follow their fantasies. But in order to turn those fantasies into realities, they need support and structure. Not traditional classroom structure, but a different kind of structure that combines freedom and support.

Types of Clubhouse structure

Clubhouse structure comes in many forms. Here are seven S's of Clubhouse structure:

The **software** in Clubhouses is selected specifically to support design-based projects, especially projects that integrate art, science, and technology.

Sample projects on the walls serve as inspiration and give new members a sense of what's possible at the Clubhouse.

Support materials (such as Sparks) help members get started on new projects.

The **setting** influences interactions in the Clubhouse. Furniture is arranged in clusters to encourage collaboration. The green table is designed to serve as a meeting place for discussions and hands-on activities, and the rolling chairs make it easier for members to get together and share ideas.

Special events, such as exhibitions of members' work, serve as catalysts for members to refine and share their projects, and give members a sense of belonging to a larger community.

Special programs, such as C2C, are designed to help members get a sense of the possibilities and opportunities beyond the Clubhouse.

Staff and mentors of the Clubhouse serve as coaches and catalysts, providing members with inspiration, support, and guidance.

What structure is appropriate?

Within the Clubhouse community, we need to have continuing discussions on what types of structure are appropriate (and most effective) for Clubhouses. For example: Is it appropriate for a mentor to run a series of workshops to introduce members to a new technique (say, making animated comic strips)? I've heard some people say that such workshops would make the Clubhouse too much like school. But, in my mind, such workshops can play an important role in helping members get started on new projects – and they are very much in the Clubhouse spirit, since members can choose whether or not they want to participate.

What types of structures do you think are needed to make your Clubhouse more successful? Are you worried that some types of structure might be inconsistent with the Clubhouse approach?

Further reading…

Freedom and Beyond, by John Holt (1972)

For more discussion on these issues, see the Clubhouse Structure thread inside The Clubhouse Approach topic in the Discussions area of the Village.

By: Mitchel Resnick, MIT Media Lab