

Youth Advisory Board Overview

Science Around Me

In Year 1, we established a kid-led advisory team to guide app development: 9th grade students from a creative writing class at Bangor High School, assisted by Heather Webb, a Bangor High teacher and Maine Writing Project (2015) TC who had also been an educator at the Maine Discovery Museum before becoming a classroom teacher. The team met five times and communicated by email between meetings.

The team set its own goals and inquiry questions:

- What should the first page you open look like?
- How do we “pull in” the audience, “kids who are usually not drawn to either science or writing?”

The team identified four features they felt should be added to the app:

- An in-app profile (“but make it safe”)
- Communication between users
- Open comment sections
- A tag system

The team identified problems and suggestions for the science content:

- **Less text** (#1 complaint: “Boring” text).
- Add more graphics and images.
- Add sound (e.g. bird sounds or a historical song about log drivers).
- Add animations or games.
- Break the text into [increasingly complex] levels, and add some kind of reward or pay-off for advancing through levels (“collect field tools to unlock the next level...”).
- Tie levels to some kind of “real-life activism like raising money for a cause.”
- Create “observation logs” or some kind of “crowd-sourced” data.
- Use more “open-ended” prompts and more writing options (e.g., “submit a short story or poem...write to your state representative or a local newspaper”).

In general, the team was a little overwhelmed with the volume and “dryness” of the science texts. They assured us kids would be turned off by too much information and too many facts (“especially all at once”). Working with the advisory team has taught us some valuable lessons.

1. Students are eager to participate and enjoy the hands-on process.
2. Students are tech savvy and very aware of problems with open communication on a web-based platform.
3. Students, as consumers, have high expectations about both the visual and entertainment factor of an app.
4. They expect opportunities for social and environmental activism.
5. They expect a wide variety of choices for self-expression through writing.