

Synthesis

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studio several times and seems to have an interest in the program, a staff member talks to them about the second phase — making a contract in which they commit themselves to a project and the program promises to provide equipment and technical expertise. Other participants come to the workshop with a particular project in mind and enter the program in the second phase.

In either case, they choose their own project. "We don't give them anything they don't want to do," Elniski noted. "A lot of the problems kids have in dealing with their lives is that they don't actively define a goal and pursue it. A contract helps them get a handle on that process."

THE CONTRACT might involve taking music lessons, completing a recording or videotaping project, writing poetry, or any of a variety of other options. Last summer, phase II participants produced a videotape on vandalism in cooperation with the Iowa City Police Department. "I don't think either group was aware of

the implications of getting that together," Elniski says. "The polarity of 'we' and 'they' dissolved in this particular instance. I don't know how lasting it is, but you plant the seed and see what happens."

Phase II participants also have formed a sound production team that can set up and operate the studio's equipment for a great variety of events. This team was responsible for part of the electronic music program at the arts festival dedicating the downtown mall.

A FEW exceptional participants become involved in phase III, which Hollister refers to as "peer instructor status": "They're really on the same level with us. They go to staff meetings and what they have to say about the program is real important and they have a heavy voice."

Although the success of a program such as Synthesis is difficult to quantify, Hollister and Elniski agree that they have seen positive changes in participants. "They're all subtle things," Elniski said. "The level of

interest increases. They're saying things like, 'I've been thinking this week about this idea.' Those little indicators are to me what really matters."

"You see people develop not only their skills, but their personalities," Hollister added. "They're a little more relaxed, a little more sensible about things."

THEIR ENTHUSIASM about Synthesis makes Elniski and Hollister believe that such a project could succeed anywhere. "It's easy to say this is a small-town project, but if it happens here it'll happen anywhere in the United States," Hollister said.

According to Elniski, gaining continued support for the program is a matter of making the community aware of the value of an arts workshop. "It has to do with raising the consciousness of the community. By producing tapes on vandalism they're possibly preventing vandalism from happening, which is saving their tax dollars later. It's getting them to see those connections."