Opportunities
Convert some of central space to individual and small group work areas.
Add more “cozy corners.”
Create a home for non-shop project types.

Built Environment Insights
While the unfinished nature of the studio is an inspiring place to work, the vastness of the space drains energy from the working environment. Participants seek out more intimate spaces or hang towards the side and back walls. Additionally, many elements of the space are too large for younger participants. The prominence of the workshop also biases quests towards building projects.

Opportunities
Break beginning DODs down into smaller experiences for younger participants.
Provide more exploration of creative process through assessments like MBTI and FourSight.
Host a gallery-walk showcase for student work.

Context of Experience Insights
Work at Hackstudio is cognitively and sometimes physically demanding, and both students and mentors are visibly exhausted by the end of each session. For youth participants, the transition from school to Hackstudio time doesn’t always include time to relax or have a snack. The role of parents at Hackstudio also remains undefined.

Opportunities
Survey parents and students for input on logistics and physical needs.
Provide snacks and ensure sufficient downtime so students have energy and focus.
Provide transportation for students from school to Hackstudio.

People Connecting Insights
While building a community is a core tenant of Hackstudio, the current model is not encouraging the right kind of connections. Participants seem reluctant to share during small group sessions but do spontaneously connect during downtime or through relationships established outside of Hackstudio.

Opportunities
Trade one of the small-group check-ins with more spontaneous group conversations.
Find opportunities to re-introduce the “giving support” suggestion.

Mentor-Kid Relationship Insights
Mentors are skilled at “meeting kids where they’re at” through mirroring body language during one-on-one check-ins. In an effort to provide a self-directed learning environment, there is an occasional mismatch between the cognitive development of a participant and the guidance a mentor will provide or not provide.

Opportunities
Give younger participants more structure/guidance through the learning process. Identify subject matter experts or resources for participants with very specific quests.

People Working Insights
While teen participants understand and embrace the process, younger kids tend to struggle. For them, this time is for exploring and creating; the learnings about failure resilience and perseverance tend to not sink in. Hackstudio also biases process over product and misses the opportunity to illustrate to participants how craft can reflect passion, meaning, and value.

Opportunities
Trade one of the small-group check-ins with more spontaneous group conversations. Provide more exploration of creative process through assessments like MBTI and FourSight. Host a gallery-walk showcase for student work.

7 site visits
16 hours observed
47 conversations conducted
351 photos taken
1 map created
3 artifacts collected

Hackstudio is a start-up in Evanston, Illinois that helps adults and youth pursue their dreams by committing to creative projects that matter to them, making and achieving incremental goals, and enjoying the support of mentors and friends in the studio environment.

In the two years since its founding, Hackstudio has continued to refine how it delivers its programming to youth. They asked our ID team to observe the youth sessions and provide feedback on the effectiveness of Hackstudio’s youth programming. How were they doing with the kids, they wondered?

We were awed by the energy and authenticity generated at Hackstudio. Mentors and staff are deeply committed to the mission and the success of each participant. Below are some of our observations from our time spent at Hackstudio over the course of the past nine weeks.
Quests are buildings. Cities have a mix of low-level homes, middle-tier buildings, and skyscrapers. Each building serving a different need at a different time.

Like-minded people coalesce and form neighborhoods. Younger neighborhoods require guidance and planning to encourage growth.

Cities have unique cultures that support their residents. Hackstudio’s culture successfully conveys its support of individuals but not always of the community.

Just as a city is the result of more than the sum of its parts, Hackstudio’s strength lies not in its individual participants but in the energy and learning that generated collectively. A city captures and maximizes new ideas because of the constant flow of people, resources, and knowledge. Although pursuits are generated and executed individually, the collective effort at Hackstudio should result in higher-level insight and learning.

You’ve focused on building the city’s infrastructure, capitalized on its geography, and built a host of amazing buildings in isolation. If you transition your mindset from architect to urban planner, what difference would this make in your work?