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# Designing for DIY

Talking through Tensions, Lessons, and Questions to Guide Innovative Learning Environments

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Abstract

How do we apply lessons learned from research on do-it-yourself (DIY) media in conscious design of practical learning environments, from classrooms to after-school clubs to websites? From fanfiction writing to video game design, DIY media has provided rich opportunities for learning. Yet while individual sites or particular youth may stand out as success stories, applying principles learned from such research into our own designed educational settings remains a challenge. In this workshop we invited participants to join in productive conversation about "tensions" faced in connecting theory to practice in thinking through design principles for creating educational affinity spaces.

Introduction

Over the past decade many have documented the rich opportunities in online environments where children and youth can create and share what t they make. These do-it-yourself (DIY) media sites can support deep learning, agency, community, and leadership. Think of the positive stories told about kids programming video games and sharing them online (Kafai & Burke, in press) or learning English through writing fanfiction in a constructive community (Black, 2008). Yet while individual websites or particular youth may stand out as success stories, applying the principles learned from such research into our own designed educational settings (local and/or online) that can reach a broad range of youth (not just a few select students) remains a challenge. In this workshop we invite participants to synthesize lessons from three current studies working to analyze and apply findings about kids' DIY media online (from writing to programming and beyond) to learning environments for young people and their teachers.

Let us be clear. We do not have all of the answers. This is not a set of presentations where we expected people to listen and come to particular "correct" answers we had thought through in advance. Rather, we presented thoughtful, in depth research on three delightfully related topics that have implications for learning, design, and practice connecting multiple types of educational spaces: online, informal, formal, and personal. We structured this workshop to elicit thoughtful conversation and problem solving around applying lessons learned from our research of online spaces to actual educational settings. Below we describe highlights from each study and outline the workshop format.

## Kids DIY Media Comparative Study (Deborah A. Fields & Sara M. Grimes).

To understand best practices of DIY media websites (Grimes & Fields, 2015), we conducted a comparative study of 120 websites where children can share media that they create. This includes an analysis of the forms of moderation, funding models, scaffolding and supports, networking residues, hierarchies of access, and line-by-line analysis of legal documents on the sites (e.g., privacy polices and terms of service that pertain to data collection, copyright, and rights of users). The results are both positive and concerning, raising questions around issues of privacy and authorship, agency and supervision, and using and consuming. We are working to create "best practices" documents to distribute to educators, designers, and policy makers; feedback from this workshop will formatively shape these best practice documents.

*Key Questions: What key questions do designers and educators need to consider in creating and using kids DIY media sites? How do they navigate the tricky territory of design needs, educational opportunities, and policy constraints?*

## Fanfiction Goes to School Study (Jayne C. Lammers).

To bring lessons learned from studying youth writers in online fanfiction sites (e.g., Lammers & Marsh, 2015) into the practice of teaching writing in school, I studied the design and facilitation of a 3-week affinity space exploration unit in a high school class. Young writers engaged in teacher-supported analysis of audience expectations in online writing spaces, such as Fanfiction.net and Wattpad, using what they learned to shape their creative writing contributions and the feedback they offered as readers. Analyzing the successes and tensions from this experience yields insights into the challenges of honoring the authentic practices of online affinity spaces while also responding to the expectations of classroom-based instruction. Feedback from this workshop will influence how I share these insights with educators and parents.

*Key Question: How can teachers support youth in creative activities, helping students develop critical thinking and creative skills without over or under scaffolding or intruding on their affinity spaces?*

## Best Practices for Teaching Multimedia Composition? (Alecia Marie Magnifico).

Many have called for teachers to adopt multimedia composition opportunities in their classrooms (e.g. Alvermann, 2008; Curwood, Magnifico, & Lammers, 2013), but few accounts of transitions to such experiences exist. Here, I document how a pre-service teaching class explored digital composition by experimenting with digital tools and social media, participating in #WalkMyWorld, an "accidental MOOC" where participants create weekly challenges and connect on Twitter. Together, we learned about benefits and risks of sharing work with a wide audience and reflected on "best practices" for multimedia writing and literacy instruction. Feedback from the workshop will help me continue innovating with pre-service teachers in the next semester of this curriculum.

*Key Question: What kinds of making/sharing experiences do teachers need to experience in preservice classes or professional development to enable them to include such activities in their own classrooms?*

## Workshop Outline

To support rich participation, the workshop was arranged in four sections.

- *Introductions & Research Briefs (15 min):* Each of the lead researchers introduced themselves and shared short briefs of key research findings from their projects, providing a background on the current work being done, highlighting challenges and issues that have arisen in applying DIY media online into the design of other learning environments.

- *Specialized Focus (15 min):* Participants divided into three groups, each one meeting with one researcher to delve into the content and problems that she specialized in (e.g., online websites; applying affinity space design to writing education; connective work across teachers and students).

- *Jigsaw Synthesis (15 min):* After focusing in on one research area, participants then regrouped so that each new group had at least one representative from each specialization. Participants outlined shared tensions that occur in designing across these different learning environments, and developed a set of design-questions that could be asked in creating new educational settings.

- *Whole Group Debrief (15 min):* At the end, the entire group reconvened to discuss the tensions, questions, and other issues that came up in our "group think".  Each group shared a few key ideas that they outlined and together we synthesized these thoughts. We worked to begin generating some "best practices" that could be applied in existing educational settings as well as ideas and questions that could be explored in future studies.

## Acknowledgments

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