DIY Media Creation

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In the coming year, this column will explore digital literacies and popular culture. Building on the critical issues raised in previous volumes, different authors will address how digital tools and new literacies shape teaching practices and learning processes. We will focus explicitly on global connections, diversity, assessment, and motivation. In our first of the four columns, we consider how online spaces can encourage young adults to develop their reading, writing, programming, and designing skills.

Motivation involves getting individuals moving (energization) toward particular activities or tasks (direction) (Pintrich, 2003). Research suggests that young adults are motivated in school settings when they believe in their own self-efficacy, have intrinsic motivation, set goals, experience agency, and demonstrate interest (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Dweck, 1999;

Pintrich & Schunk, 2002; Renninger, Hidi, & Krapp, 1992). With literacy in particular, this encourages young writers to set more effective goals and improve their "will to write" (Boscolo & Hidi, 2007, p. 2). While promoting this kind of self-driven motivation can be a challenge in school, there is strong evidence that young adults are often highly motivated to engage with digital literacies and drive the creation of their own content.

Outside of school, research indicates that many online spaces are focused on networking around do-it-yourself (DIY) projects that may involve writing, programming, and drawing. These afford many educational opportunities, including writing for a specific audience (Magnifico, 2010), creating multigenre responses to literature (Curwood, 2013), giving and receiving constructive criticism (Black, 2009), and creating collaborative projects (Brennan, Resnick, & Monroy-Hernandez, 2010). Not only are youth motivated by the diverse opportunities for communication, collaboration, and creativity, their participation is supported by the multimodal and interactive design of the particular online spaces. For instance, the design may support audience feedback, peer collaboration, and motivation through features such as contests, comments, badges, or other designed features for feedback such as "likes" and the ability to share across various social media tools.

As researchers and teacher educators, we are interested in how young adults learn in informal, out-of-school, and online environments, including sites that can supplement and enhance the learning opportunities and content available schools. Many of us are energized to create, make, share, and learn. For instance, Maker Faires have grown in popularity in recent years and provide a space for individuals to celebrate the DIY mindset through arts, crafts, and science projects. (For more information, visit http://makerfaire.com.) DIY
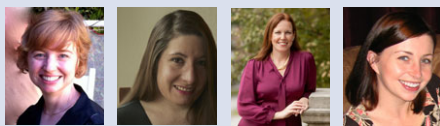
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culture has also flourished online, where geographic boundaries and time zones are no longer major obstacles. To highlight how designed environments foster motivation and digital literacy, we focus specifically on two project-based DIY sites, Figment.com and Scratch.mit.edu. From reading and writing to programming and designing, these online spaces offer young adults around the world an opportunity to interact and collaborate with others around a shared passion. In this article, we focus specifically on the design features of these DIY sites and consider how they motivate young adults' digital literacy practices.

Figment: A DIY Creative Writing Community

Figment is an online social networking forum (Grimes & Fields, 2012) devoted to young people's original fiction writing and reading. The site was founded in 2010 by two *New Yorker* writers, and it is currently owned by Random House publishers. Figment provides an informal social network, which the site describes as a "community where you can share your writing, connect with other readers, and discover new stories and authors." While Figment is focused on original

creative writing and young adult novels, it also includes an array of web forums, including spaces where fan fiction and role-play flourish. This site has never been fan-created or fan-maintained; rather, Figment's funding initially came from angel investors and publishers who market their books to young people through book recommendations, free excerpts, expert-judged contests, and author interactions (Springen, 2011).

The Daily Fig, the site's blog, provides news in several categories including "books and authors" (e.g., author chats, YA book news), "the writing life" (e.g., writing tips, features about individual Figs), and "diversions" (e.g., contests, quizzes, articles about various fandoms). Young writers who frequent Figment, known as "Figs," interact with each other in chats on their profiles, in smaller groups, or in the public forums directed toward aspects of reading and writing, including recommended reading, feedback requests, fandom activities, writing in various genres. This news spreads further to social media networks through official site accounts and regular posts from the Figment staff on Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Google+, and Pinterest.

As a DIY writing space, Figment's design includes many features typical of writing sites, allowing writers

FIGURE 1 A book profile of a popular story, showing previews, social reactions, comments, and reviews
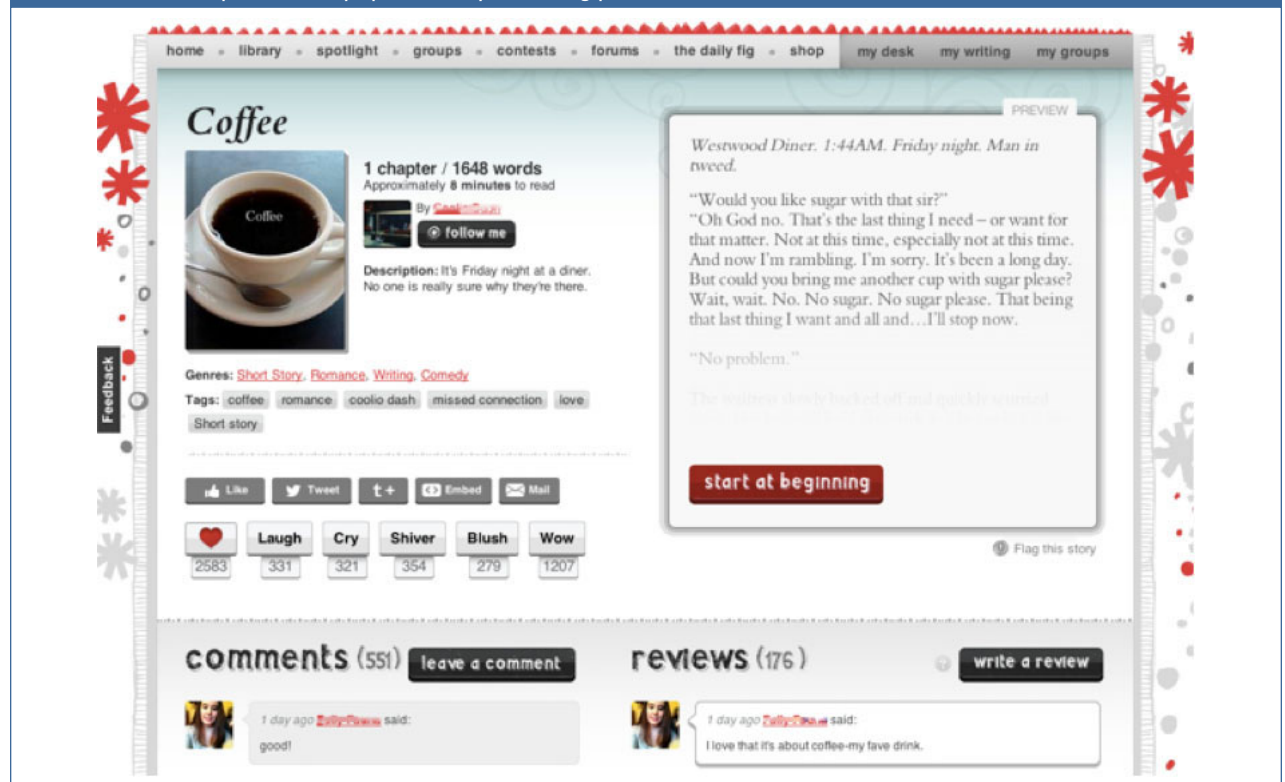
to post profiles, share their own writings (known as "books" on the site), comment and review others' written works, and join topic-focused groups. Users' social networking profiles are public, and users' individual books may be shared either with a public or limited readership within Figment. This feature allows Figment writers to form relationships with beta-readers who provide feedback on draft writings (Black, 2009), then release their work publicly when it is complete. Similarly, educators may also create restricted groups, private spaces for students to share ideas and resources, as well as workshop their writings. Members may then publish their work to the public Figment audience. Such opportunities to consider the viewpoints of and critique from audience members have been shown to be important, energizing developmental opportunities for young writers and DIY creators (Curwood, Magnifico, & Lammers, 2013; Halverson, 2012; Lunsford & Ede, 2009; Soep, 2006).

Frequent links to larger social networks direct users to share their work beyond Figment. If books win contests or receive enough attention through users' comments and "hearts" (similar to a "like" on Facebook or Tumblr), they may be featured in the site's library of books written by Figs. These and other design elements such as contests, badges, social media following, and periodic access to professional writers and editors, energize users in the direction of reading, writing, and sharing widely. Figment is a transmedia, DIY writing space created by publishers

FIGURE 2 Figment's depiction of the organization's social media presence

and adult writers for young adult writers. The space, on the whole, is a mixture of motivating virtual writers' workshops, an educational venture directed toward reading and writing, and a tool for marketing young adult fiction to teen fans—a group of people who read and write voraciously.

Scratch: A Creative DIY Programming Community

Scratch.mit.edu forms another type of DIY online social networking forum where participants, mostly youth ages 11–18 years, share their computer programs in the form of animations, games, stories, simulations, and interactive art (Resnick et al., 2009). Launched in 2007 out of the MIT Media Lab, the Scratch site has grown to more than 3.1 million registered members and 5.2 million projects, with tens of thousands of active users every month. As a type of social networking forum, activity on Scratch is directed toward the creation and sharing of user-created projects. Indeed, creating and sharing a Scratch project is the most basic form of activity on the site and acts as a gateway for other activities like commenting on, downloading, and favoriting projects (Fields, Giang, & Kafai, 2013).

Much like Figment, Scratch shares many design features with other DIY social networking forums that together promote a sense of being part of a larger community of people with shared interests and diverse expertise, a key element supporting youth creative activities (Brennan et al., 2011; Fields, Vasudevan, & Kafai, 2014). Features such as the ability to comment on, tag, download, "love," and "favorite" projects energize users to interact with each other's creations. Users can also "follow" others and subsequently see updates on those individuals' site activities, such as when they post a new project or comment. User profiles are portfolio based, highlighting individuals' created projects, favorited projects, links to their curated galleries of projects and the other users they are following. All of these features provide direction and impetus for users in navigating the Scratch site, connecting with others who have shared interests, giving and receiving feedback, and finding projects (and creators) that might be of interest to them. This, in turn, can support the sense of community, peer support, and their own identities as creators (Brennan, Valverde, Prempeh, Roque, & Chung, 2011).

Perhaps most unique to Scratch.mit.edu is the transparency built into the site. Scratch itself is an open source programming language, and the website
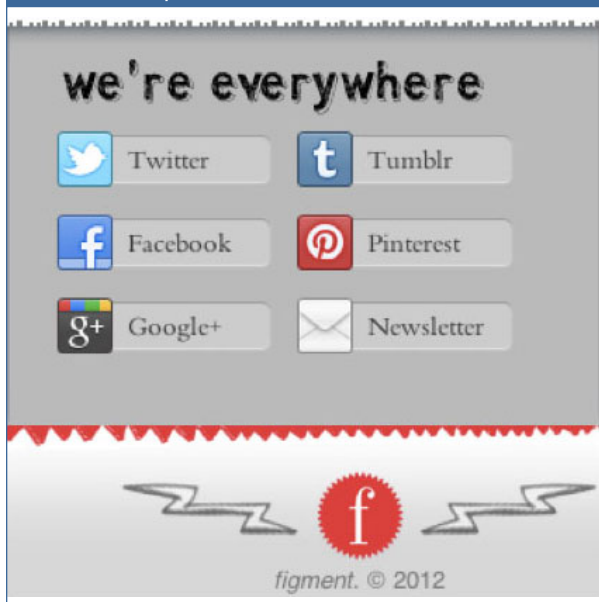
supports the ethos of open source creativity—every Scratch project shared on the site is fully public, and the site allows users to "See Inside" to the programming, graphics, and sound of the projects. Users can edit others' projects directly, changing around the code to create new effects without having to create something new from scratch. If they choose to save this edited version it is posted as "remix" with a link to the original project. Seeing a range and multiple versions of projects can energize youth in the direction of creating their own projects. In addition, viewing others' work may promote a view of the social side of creativity, learning what a community views as creative, original, good, and thought-provoking (Csikszentmihalyi & Wolfe, 2001). Finally, transparency into the creative process allows youth to see creating as a process with many revisions, improvements, struggles, and changes along the way.

Classroom Connections

Figment and Scratch encourage youth in the direction of creative media production by connecting them to others interested in reading, writing, programming,

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FIGURE 3 One author's profile in Scratch, featuring a favorite project, news, and personal bio
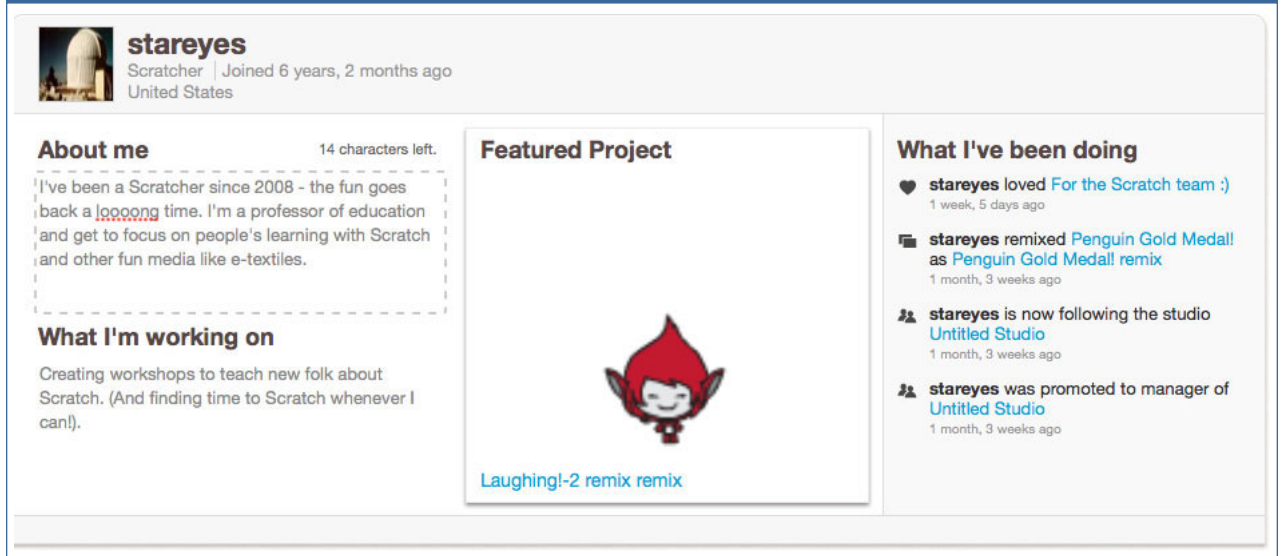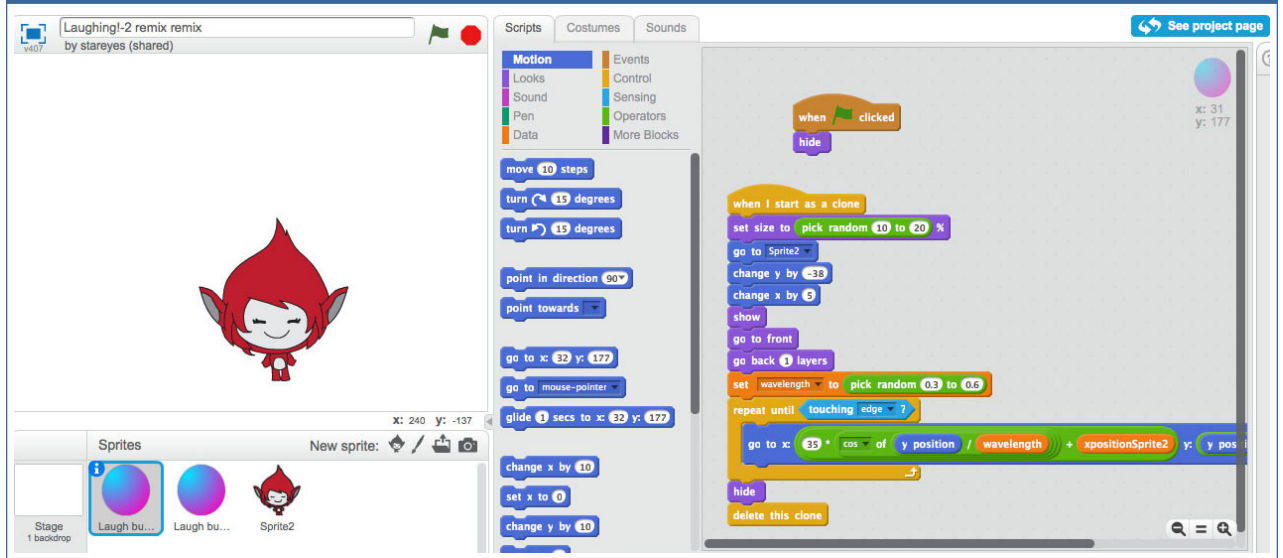

FIGURE 4 A project in Scratch using the "See Inside" feature. Any user can edit and save shared projects

and designing. By incorporating familiar aspects of social networking forums, such as comments, likes, and sharing features, these project-based DIY websites encourage collaboration and provide youth with a passionate audience for their creative works and computer programs. Rather than specifically recommend that literacy educators bring these particular DIY sites into their classrooms, we suggest that teachers explore some of the following digital tools that can similarly energize students in the direction of collaboration and social interaction to foster digital literacy and media production in schools.

> Collaborize Classroom: A free, online collaboration platform allowing students and teachers to interact through discussion forums, shared multimodal resources, and teacher-created groups. The site provides teacher resources, including a topic library, and reports to facilitate assessment of student participation. http://www.collaborizeclassroom.com/

> Jing: A free, downloadable tool for capturing and annotating from your computer screen. It can be used by teachers and peers to give students formative feedback on their writing or other assignments, or can be used by students to create screencasts of their web-based research for a project. http://www.techsmith.com/jing.html

> Kaizena: This Google Drive app allows users to give formative feedback on shared documents. Teachers and peers can add written feedback, voice comments, and web links on highlighted text within documents. http://kaizena.com/

> Padlet: Provides users with a free web-based "wall" to collaboratively, or individually, create from a blank canvas. The possibilities are endless as students add text, image, video, or other web-based resources to their wall for a variety of purposes, including to demonstrate their learning about a topic, plan group projects, or engage in pre-writing brainstorming. http://padlet.com/

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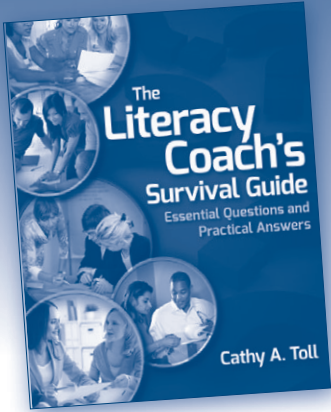
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