YOUNG & CREATIVE

Digital Technologies
Empowering Children in Everyday Life

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The International Clearinghouse on
CHILDREN, YOUTH & MEDIA

A UNESCO Initiative 1997

In 1997, the Nordic Information Centre for Media and Communication Research (Nordicom), University of Gothenburg, Sweden, began establishment of the International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media. The overall point of departure for the Clearinghouse's efforts with respect to children, youth and media is the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The aim of the Clearinghouse is to increase awareness and knowledge about children, youth and media, thereby providing a basis for relevant policy-making, contributing to a constructive public debate, and enhancing children's and young people's media literacy and media competence. Moreover, it is hoped that the Clearinghouse's work will stimulate further research on children, youth and media.

The International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media informs various groups of users – researchers, policy-makers, media professionals, voluntary organisations, teachers, students and interested individuals – about

- research on children, young people and media, with special attention to media violence,

- research and practices regarding media education and children's/young people's participation in the media, and

- measures, activities and research concerning children's and young people's media environment.

Fundamental to the work of the Clearinghouse is the creation of a global *network.* The Clearinghouse publishes a *yearbook* and *reports.* Several *bibliographies* and a worldwide *register of organisations* concerned with children and media have been compiled. This and other information is available on the Clearinghouse's *web site*:

www.nordicom.gu.se/clearinghouse

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Nordicom is an organ of co-operation between the Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The overriding goal and purpose is to make the media and communication efforts undertaken in the Nordic countries known, both throughout and far beyond our part of the world.

Nordicom uses a variety of chan-nels – newsletters, journals, books, databases – to reach researchers, students, decision-makers, media practitioners, journalists, teachers and interested members of the general public.

Nordicom works to establish and strengthen links between the Nordic research community and colleagues in all parts of the world, both by means of unilateral flows and by linking individ-ual researchers, research groups and institutions.

Nordicom also documents media trends in the Nordic countries. The joint Nordic information addresses users in Europe and further afield. The production of comparative media statistics forms the core of this service.

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Creativity on YouTube

Considering New Media and the Impulses of the Learner

Danah Henriksen & Megan Hoelting

In today's globalized media, a new type of individual has emerged as a celebrity. Such individuals work creatively with a range of media, often converging on one particular platform: YouTube. One of the oldest examples of this type of celebrity is Smosh[1], a duo, Anthony Padilla and Ian Hecox, who established their comedic channel in 2005, which went on to generate a number of spin-offs. The two young millionaires represent a wave of creative artists who are flexible and aware of the creative power of this medium.

Smosh began in 2005; today, there are more examples of YouTube stars and popular channels than most traditional media can keep up with. For example, Joey Graceffa[2] is just such an adaptable YouTube star. His early creative work on his YouTube channel garnered him a large multimedia contract and a place in the arena of popular culture. Spawned by his success in YouTube media, he has found opportunities to collaborate with other artists, write for a web series, and bring his ideas into multiple arenas. Most recently, Graceffa made headlines with his memoir, *In Real Life: My Journey to a Pixelated World*, in which he came out as homosexual.

This announcement is revolutionary compared to coming-out announcements from more traditional stars, such as Ellen DeGeneres, Lance Bass, Clay Aiken, and Adam Lambert – who all provided exclusive interviews in traditional media. Though this new medium,
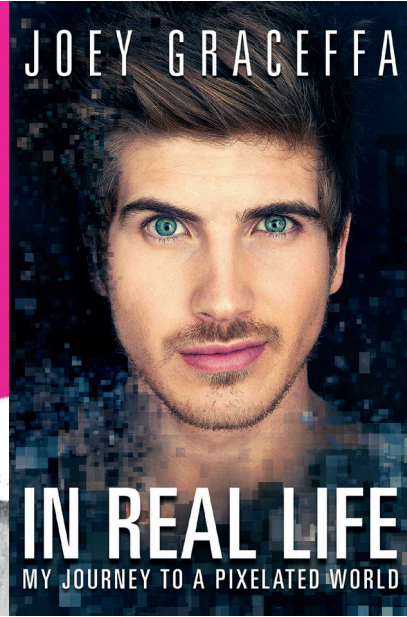
Image 1. The Smosh duo

Image 2. Joey Graceffa on his book cover

Graceffa had the creative power to use YouTube to decide how he wanted to communicate and share with others. This is just one example of a phenomenon in which youths are gaining creative power in new media, to exercise their voices, create and share content, and participate in creative communities globally.

New technologies have opened up such possibilities for young creative artists, like Graceffa, to showcase their talents and ideas online. YouTube has been the prime example and source of the global phenomenon of video creation and sharing. Accelerating technological growth has caused our society to reconsider how we work, think, and act (Mishra, Koehler, & Henriksen, 2011; Mokyr, Vickers, & Ziebarth, 2015), and we find ourselves in a world where knowledge, entertainment, and content can be created, communicated, and obtained more quickly and easily than ever (Zhao, 2012). New digital tools, from smartphones to free online image, audio, or video editors (such as the YouTube Video Editor, WeVideo, Audacity, or Pixlr), have put new media technology for content creation and sharing in the hands of more

people than ever – particularly young people. With the power of these tools, society has seen a rise in what has been termed "content creation." This means that anyone, with the right tools, has the ability to create video or audio content and share it via avenues like YouTube (Burgess & Green, 2013). The growth and magnitude of the medium, across a range of video content, topics, and genres, is rooted in what new media allow people to do – create, communicate, collaborate and share – in powerful and global ways (Lange, 2007; Haridakis & Hanson, 2009).

In this article, we suggest that the affordances of YouTube have put significant creativity in the hands of more youths than ever. This has revolutionized how systems of creativity operate, and has allowed for the phenomenon of YouTube stars. Avenues like YouTube allow people to sidestep traditional gatekeepers within a field, to become successful content creators, sharing their work directly with an audience. This has implications for society, culture, and education in the opportunities it offers to create and share.

We suggest that this connects with Dewey's (1943) and Bruce & Levin's (1997) framework for viewing media and technology as a way to address "the four impulses" of the learner. As described by Dewey, these impulses are: to inquire, to communicate, to construct, and to express (Dewey, 1943; Bruce & Levin, 1997). New media offer affordances for creating and sharing, which opens up possibilities to explore all these learning impulses. The culturally pervasive popularity of YouTube and other new media may lie in the way they address these needs and impulses. As educational contexts seek to meet the creative needs of youth, we suggest revisiting the educational foundations of Dewey – in speaking to these four impulses as a framework for educational technology. But first, we consider how new media like YouTube reveal a change in systems of creativity, with greater participation by students and youth.

The changing landscape of content creators

YouTube has remodeled how culture, art, and knowledge emerge in the online medium (Snickars & Vonderau, 2009). It is one of the more impactful global phenomena that media and culture have experienced. YouTube statistics note that the platform has over a billion users – about a third of all people on the Internet. Daily, hundreds of millions

of hours of YouTube videos are watched, generating billions of views. Beyond this, YouTube has local versions in over 88 countries, with more than 76 different navigational languages (covering 95% of the Internet population) (YouTube Press Statistics, n.d.).

Across the medium there are examples of people enjoying tremendous success and popularity (i.e. "YouTube stars") in genres ranging across comedy, music, the arts, science, fashion, makeup and beauty, general interest, and countless specialized topics (Henriksen, Hoelting, & the Deep-Play Research Group, 2016). The majority of major YouTube artists predominantly describe themselves as "content creators." This term defines these artists not simply as entertainers or informers, but rather as creators of ideas, of actions, of *content* (Susarla, Oh & Tan, 2012).

We propose that the artists who find great success on YouTube are becoming a new form of expert. These experts are content creators who can now bypass the standard gatekeepers of genres before distributing their work. Bereiter & Scardamalia's (1993) definition of expertise notes that it is not only determined by knowledge or tenure in an area, but by how the knowledge is adapted to unique contexts and new challenges. There are still experts in traditional domains that may pose valid questions about these new creative displays, and communities of practice still have gatekeepers to success. However, emerging and popular artists on YouTube are reframing their domain and its context of how creative systems operate and the communities that participate in them.

In a recent study (conducted in 2014 and replicated in 2015), researchers asked youths aged 13–18 to compare the influence and popularity of YouTube stars to that of mainstream traditional stars (Dredge, 2016). They found that YouTube stars such as Smosh, the Fine Bros, KSI and Ryan Higa were considered more influential than mainstream celebrities like Paul Walker, Jennifer Lawrence, Katy Perry and Bruno Mars. This represents a transformation in youth culture, whereby more young people have the tools and access to produce content, and even more youths globally can find, connect, and communicate about it. In the past, the tools and platforms for such creation and connection did not exist in ways that would allow such youth participation, but their recent advent is generating a shift in creative systems.

New media redefines systems of creativity

Csikszentmihalyi (1997) discusses how in traditional systems, creativity emerges from a dynamic interaction between the *individual*, the *domain*, and the *field*. In this, *individuals* (or groups/teams) make creative works, ideas, art, or discoveries. Creativity is also impacted at the level of the *domain*, or an area of specific knowledge (e.g. mathematics, biology, physics, art, law, and more), where people use domain ideas, information, tools and symbols to create new works. Then, through the *field*, creative works may be shared with an audience or disseminated. The field involves people who act as gatekeepers to decide what is important and what will be distributed into broader culture or disciplines. The field has typically reflected the communal organization of "experts," in communities of practice – people with the knowledge and clout to decide what would be shared to influence the domain, socially and culturally (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Who the gatekeepers are depends on context. It might entail a Nobel Prize committee, journal editors or reviewers, music or movie industry executives, Olympic judges, and so on (Henriksen Hoelting, & the Deep-Play Research Group, 2016). In the past, the field was the only entity that determined which creative works would be shared for social and cultural impact (Sawyer, 2006). This model is visualized in the image shown below.
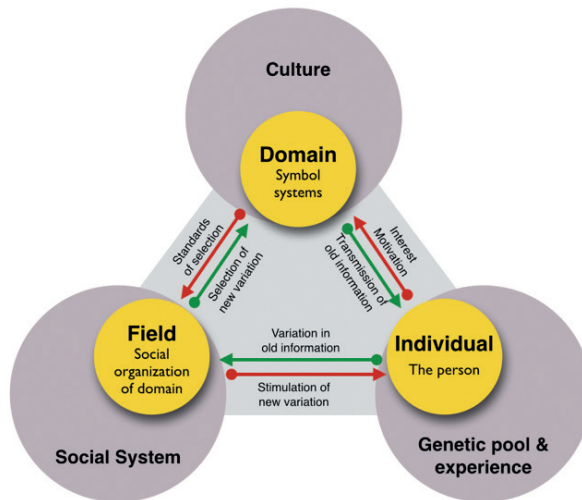

Figure 1. Csikszentmihalyi's model of traditional creativity systems

Examples like Smosh and Joey Graceffa are not anomalies in new media (Berg, 2015). They represent a fast growing phenomenon, in which individuals can use new media to sidestep the traditional gatekeepers of creativity (the field), and propel themselves to creative success. In altering this gatekeeping aspect of creative systems, new media allow for creation and sharing in powerful ways, and youths have been among the first to recognize and harness these capabilities (Harlan, Bruce, & Lupton, 2012). Video, audio, and other creative media tools have affordances that allow a young audience to explore, create, and share. We suggest that these impulses for exploration, creation and sharing are human and innate. They have always been present, but now there are avenues to pursue them and participate through media as a means of creativity.

Understanding new media through a Deweyan lens

Foundational ideas described by Dewey (1943) may inform what motivates young people to learn with media. These foundations are visible in the social phenomenon of YouTube as a means of creating and sharing work. The future of education may be well served to consider this framework as a lens for creative teaching and learning with media.

Dewey (1943) identified a natural basis for learning as the greatest educational resource or psychological reserve that society might tap into. This includes what he described as the four natural impulses of the child. These innate, or natural, interests revolve around following the impulses of learners: 1) *to inquire (to ask and explore questions, or to find things out);* 2) *to communicate (to connect and share ideas with others, to communicate and enter into the social world);* 3) *to construct (to build or make things);* and 4) *to express (to engage in personal expression of one's self, feelings, and ideas).* Dewey asserted that education should build curricula around these instinctive impulses rather than separating learning into the traditional disciplines. From a Deweyan perspective, the greatest imperative for education is to nurture these impulses, building a trajectory for lifelong learning.

These four impulses may clue us in to motivations underlying the phenomenon of how YouTube and new media are shaping our world. Consider what new creative media allow youths to do, as they engage with video, images, sound, text, and more, through technologies that

indulge these four impulses. The affordances offered by the YouTube platform, and other media for creation and sharing, suggest that new technologies may be motivational and exciting based on how they allow people to inquire, communicate, construct, and express.

Twenty years ago, as digital technologies were on the cusp of becoming more widespread in society and schools, Bruce & Levin (1997) proposed using Dewey's framework of the four impulses to view media for learning. They argued that most approaches to educational technology, like schooling, were organized around traditional perspectives. Instead of a technology-tool-centered focus, they suggested that education consider the kinds of motivations, interests, and inspirations that media could allow people to engage with. They noted that classifying educational technologies by how they allow for Dewey's (1943) natural learning impulses may be a productive and exciting approach to learning.

When Bruce & Levin (1997) proposed this idea 20 years ago, the available technologies were more limited in power, capabilities, and affordances than today. Yet the core constructs of Dewey's foundations contained strength and value for thinking about media. Despite these strengths, however, many schools in many contexts (both then and now) operate with a more tool-centered focus rather than building learning around media as a venue for inquiry, communication, construction, and expression. We suggest that 21st-century education might consider how the YouTube phenomenon has swept up the interests of youth, as both producers and consumers of content. This may offer a model of thinking about how classrooms could focus less on the rigid boundaries of traditional curricula and subjects, and instead work with media to stimulate and develop inquiry, communication, construction, and expression. In this, students and teachers can view themselves as creative individuals and creators of content.

Exploiting the potential for creative education

The popularity of YouTube may lie in what it allows people to do, in the power to create and also connect to the larger world. YouTube offers ways to inquire (to ask questions and create or find videos that explore ideas in the world around us); to communicate (to hear and share ideas from others, through the viewing and sharing of content); to construct

(to build or make content, in ways that let people participate, rather than accepting prepackaged content); and to express (to share our own views, feelings, or identity). We do not suggest that everything on YouTube is important or useful content, as this is clearly not the case. But it is important to consider how it allows for a new creative reality among young people. It is a motivational approach to media that inspires youths to join and explore, create, and share – via the prospect of engaging their natural impulses to inquire, communicate, construct, and express. This takeaway is a powerful one for education, in terms of classroom content and new media for creativity.

Since its inception, YouTube has been a site for artists to upload their original or remixed works. The balance between consumers and producers initially leaned heavily toward consumers (YouTube Press Statistics, n.d.); however, while the site still has more consumers than producers, the ratio is becoming increasingly more balanced. This has two possible interpretations: more creators are discovering the site; or consumers are realizing their creative potential and adding their own content to the site. In either (or both) cases, it signifies a shift in how people are interacting with media. We are entering the age of the *creative consumer*, one who is hungry for new media but also capable of creating their own when they find the status quo lacking. This has repercussions for the potential of youths to participate in creative communities, and for diverse voices that have been lost in the past. Noticing gaps in representation can become a catalyst for creation (Kaitlyn Alexander interview, Piccoli, 2015), and an opportunity to connect youths to the wider world and a greater diversity of voice.

Furthermore, content creators are not confined to one form of media; they feel comfortable enough in their expertise to make creative attempts with other modalities or a range of topics and subjects. The "content" these creators distribute is not limited by mode or discipline. For example, some of the most popular content creators (Grace Helbig, Mamrie Hart, Tyler Oakley, etc.) have expanded their artistry to other platforms, which often necessitates a new mode of communication. In a classroom, such a perspective would alter the rigid structure of course content. To encourage students to become boundary-crossing content creators, we might readjust our worldview to one that "demands new pedagogical structures that respect nonconformity and the urge to

explore for the sake of exploration, to value risk-taking and learning from failure and error" (de Oliveira et al., 2015, p. 20).

Image 3. The elements of content creation

What might learning in schools look like if education offered more constructivist opportunities, through new media, for students to try their hand at being "content creators" of their own learning? Many are already engaging in this informally, outside the school context; so, we ask, how might education consider the "content creator" model for learning in schools? There are also implications involved in asking what it might mean for teachers to view themselves as content creators, given the autonomy and flexibility to creatively design opportunities and environments for their students. What if we organized teaching and learning not around the typical structures of schooling, but rather in opportunities to use media for inquiry, communication, construction, and expression? We do not offer immediate answers to such questions, but as digital technologies and 21st-century learning move forward, it may be time for education to seriously consider them.

We have noted that creative systems are evolving, based on YouTube and other new media, to allow for greater creative participation in certain contexts and genres. People often operate online as either consumers or producers of content, and there are now more producers than in the past – certainly among youth. It is also interesting to note that more educational channels are arriving on the scene, such as Minute Physics and ASAP Science (Welbourne & Grant, 2015). This suggests

that content creation can intersect with big ideas and school content, in ways that can be compelling for teaching and learning.

We have proposed ideas and questions for consideration, suggesting that the YouTube model of a content creator might be valuable for teaching and learning in the classroom. We have noted that Dewey (1943) and Bruce & Levin (1997) established ideas about media as a way to connect with the four impulses of the learner, which seems prevalent for the world we live in and for education broadly. Currently, these are still ideas and questions; but in noting them, we point to their potential for youth creativity in school settings. As most of the questions in this new arena may not be fully known or articulated yet, we propose that the field consider these emergent issues and bring them into the broader discourse. All of this points to the overarching issue of how the power of new media for creation can be harnessed to promote a creative and expansive mindset in students. Perhaps appropriately for the shifting terrain of new media, we conclude with more questions than answers – offering these as emergent and vital possibilities and considerations for creativity and education.

Notes

1. https://www.youtube.com/smosh
2. https://www.youtube.com/JoeyGraceffa

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This book *YOUNG & CREATIVE – Digital Technologies Empowering Children in Everyday Life* aims to catch different examples where children and youth have been active and creative by their own initiative, driven by intrinsic motivation, personal interests and peer relations. We want to show the opportunities of digital technologies for creative processes of children and young people. The access to digital technology and its growing convergence has allowed young people to experiment active roles as cultural producers. Participation becomes a keyword when "consumers take media into their own hands". Digital technologies offer the potential of different forms of participatory media culture, and finally creative practices.

YOUNG and CREATIVE is a mix of research articles, interviews and case studies. The target audience of this book is students, professionals and researchers working in the field of education, communication, children and youth studies, new literacy studies and media and information literacy.

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