Full-Contact Poetry

Anindita Basu

B.A. (Honors) in Computer Science and English
May 2000, Wellesley College

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Author
Anindita Basu
Program in Media Arts and Sciences
t 9, 2002

Certified by
David Cavallo
Research Associate of the Media Laboratory
Thesis Advisor

Accepted by
Andrew B. Lippman
Chair, Departmental Committee on Graduate Students
Program in Media Arts and Sciences

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abstract

Full-Contact Poetry is a digital play space for children's poetic expression. It is a software environment in which children can express their poetic thoughts, create their interpretations of writing by others and also share these expressions. The environment combines ideas from literary theory and analysis with constructionism to extend tools for poetic expression. Children can experience poetry by playing with words as objects, experimenting with typographic effects, moving words through space and navigating into and through the text, while also being able to incorporate and reconfigure sound and image.

In this thesis, I first describe the Full-Contact Poetry environment then continue with a discussion of a workshop I led for six weeks with a small group of teenagers from Boston. The workshop raised many important issues that fall under the interconnected themes of: finding a voice, creating a language and negotiating context. The experience required negotiations at many levels from our small group. Each member needed to find an individual voice both as part of the group and as a poet. As a group, we needed to develop a language with which we could discuss the work that we were creating since the traditional language regarding poetry, or even workshops, did not quite apply. Finally, we were faced with new contexts. The workshop setting encouraged a classroom feeling, yet it was not a classroom. We were working with technology, but not in the way the children were accustomed—likewise with poetry. The thesis explores the challenges of facilitating an environment to support children's expression and the role that personal models play in shaping that environment.

David Cavallo
Research Associate of the Media Laboratory
Thesis Advisor

Full-Contact Poetry

Anindita Basu

The following people served as readers for this thesis:

Reader
Edith Ackermann
Visiting Professor of Architecture
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Reader
Glorianna Davenport
Principal Research Associate of the Media Laboratory
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

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table of contents

1. introduction

1.1 motivation

"Listen, and be aware of the energy and power of words. Do not abandon the self, retain the culture, return to thinking, stop the passive role of the observer, and take up the sport of life" [1].

The phrase "full-contact poetry" was inspired by the collection *Aloud: Voices from the Nuyorican Poets' Cafe*, a compilation of slam poetry [1]. In the introduction, the editor speaks of the immediacy and vitality of poetry, of poetry as a "contact sport," not "an exhibit in a Dust Museum." He describes poetry as a way to take on the world, of writers and readers facing off through words—both written and spoken. He could have been describing my experience of reading and writing poetry.

His description grabbed me and made me to think about how slam poets relate to poetry through performance, and how that in turn relates to my poetic experience. There is a connection to words in a particular way that can be playful or meticulous, but either way there is passion.

Many people do not share this enthusiasm for poetry. Many see poetry as the high art of language—something that requires a particular type of intelligence or multiple degrees or at the very least, great effort. Many either fear trying or do not think trying would be worth the effort. A number of years ago, I would have agreed.

As a child, I loved playing with words, especially since I spoke Bengali and English. I could make nonsensical phrases across languages, relish the sounds of word combinations, even invent words. I loved children's songs, poetry and nursery rhymes. As I grew older, however, I stopped associating poetry with play. The word "poetry" evoked images of obscurity and incomprehension.

During our high school introductory poetry unit, this vague impression was reinforced. I did not care about looking at a blackbird thirteen different ways [50]. I did not see whatever deep meaning my teacher was attributing to the poem. The few lines about a red wheelbarrow and eating someone's plum elicited similar results [54]. I thought poetry was pointless, obscure, incomprehensible and utterly meaningless. That opinion shattered when we read Sylvia Plath.

Plath, like a rock musician, speaks to adolescent girls. Her story is morbidly fascinating, her writing weirdly compelling, her poetry completely unlike what poems are "supposed to be." She wrote in straightforward English about alarmingly real and raw emotion [40]. I suddenly understood the power of poetry.

Our homework for the night was to write a dramatic monologue like Robert Browning's poem "My Last Duchess" [8]. It was my first attempt at writing a poem since primary school exercises, but this time, I had a new concept of poetry. I was hooked. I discovered that I could externalize and craft a piece of myself, as well as look at another's work and recognize "That's it exactly!"

Once I had an entry point into poetry, I understood why I might want to look at a blackbird in thirteen different ways and read about red wheelbarrows. I wanted to do

something with words, so I tried to understand how others accomplished seemingly miraculous feats with theirs. I grew to love even lofty writers such as Shakespeare, Milton and Keats. I could see what was skillful and compelling in their work, the reality of it, the emotion.

Poetry became my vehicle to understanding and relating to the world. I could express and reflect upon my inner self, work through emotions or problems and also find resonance with other people's experiences through their writing. I felt a connection to Madeleine L'Engle's young heroine Vicky Austin who, when accused of hiding in poetry and trying to escape from the world, responded, "That's how you find the real world" [31].

Part of the motivation of this thesis is my desire for others to be able to share this experience of reading and writing, of finding and understanding the "real" world and the inner world through poetry. I thought of ways in which individuals engage with text, besides simply reading and writing, as entry points into this world, since many people share the difficulty that I had with poetry. One of the first examples to come to mind was Shakespeare and theatre.

When putting on a Shakespearean drama, directors and actors must enter a text in a highly critical manner in order to bring it to life and convey their vision to an audience. Their analysis involves much of what a high school English class may do with one of Shakespeare's plays, for example, but instead of feeling burdened by the analysis as an end in itself, the analysis becomes a step in their collective creative process. They need to understand motivations, how the characters are like them, in order to play them. They need to extract how to stage the play, what the setting should look like, how characters should dress, where they should stand, so their analysis of the play becomes part of a

constructive process and part of themselves. They make something out of their analysis instead of the analysis serving as an end in itself. Theatre allows both the creators and audience to enjoyably experience text instead of promoting a fear of literature [53].

Thinking about theatre helped crystallize my thoughts on the role of analysis and criticism: deconstruction can help to understand a work, but recreating something of the pieces helps form a relationship with that work and appropriate that work. In many classrooms, students try to understand the poem, how it functions, its various elements, but without some form of synthesis, the pieces scatter meaninglessly and impersonally.

My feelings towards poetry changed once I could personally relate to its purpose. I could take apart and understand existing poetry to see how others accomplish their craft in order to appropriate their techniques into my developing style. I could use their writing as examples to try to understand this new language so that I could learn how to translate raw material such as emotion, experience or narrative into art that is readily available to others in the way that certain authors in their simple words speak deeply to me [49].

With these ideas in mind, I began to think about possible environments for constructing from text. I wanted to capture the idea of the Nuyoricans, of making poetry a "full-contact sport," but to accomplish this I would somehow have to tease out the full-contact element of poetry. How could children take poetry and bring it off of the page, into some new, dynamic space, as actors breathe life into Shakespeare? I looked at the history of the work of The Epistemology and Learning Group and more specifically, my group, The Future of Learning, and found many examples of constructionist environments for math, programming and physics. The environments provide spaces for children to explore powerful ideas in math and science through the personal act of construction. Children

can experience math as mathematicians instead of being tricked into learning similar material minus the context [36].

I wanted to build something similar for poetry to open up another area to children. While creating art is an inherently constructive activity, I wanted to emphasize the other side as well in the environment so that it would contain both constructive and deconstructive elements, strike a balance between constructionism and literary theory, computer science and poetry. Full-Contact Poetry should capture the process of writing, reading, editing and revising as related to the processes of constructing, deconstructing, appropriating and reconstructing.

1.2 cultures of poetic expression

Full-Contact Poetry began with a desire to give children tools to embody language and make it dance, to appropriate and reconstruct poems. This idea evolved into something broader. The tool had to support a greater collaboration, a poetic culture, as well as provide a playground for poetry. Poets continuously borrow from each other's work, for example Keats use of Miltonic phrasing, but they also thrive off of exchange. They give feedback, criticism and support to each other, similar to the way an individual poet might engage a piece, but at a community level. Instead of an individual doing all of the work of reading, writing, interpreting and reconstructing, a culture also emulates this process. Multiple poets read, write and appropriate each other's work.

The Nuyoricans created a strong culture around their work. What originated with a group of Latinos in New York City spread across the country to many "minority" cultures,

whether by race, gender or sexual orientation. Slam poetry has its own scene, usually in a bar or coffee shop. Poets get in the ring, give their performance and feel the audience response, through cheers and jeers, but also by the peer review system of choosing three audience members at random to give scores from zero to ten.

Slam poetry addresses a variety of topics through varying attitudes. What matters most, however, is the poet's presentation. Many poems address issues relevant to a particular group, such as racism, hate crimes, or the experience of being treated as an outsider. Other poems celebrate differences and serve as affirmations. Poets take on issues of technology, change, and more traditional topics, such as love and death. The relationship between the poet and the audience is crucial, however. Poets must engage the audience and put themselves on the line not only through their words, but also through their investment in performing those words.

The Nuyorican movement flourished because of this tight connection, both to the issues expressed in the poetry and in the entire community's participation. Everyone is a part of the poem. When audience members sit in a café, listening to a poetry slam, they are invited to respond, cheer, heckle—to enter the piece and move beyond listening and into participation. Many poets call directly for audience responses within their poems.

Similarly, rap and hip-hop sprung up around New York's poor neighborhoods and gave young people a new space for their voices. Rap and hip-hop artists also used rhythm and rhyme, and a culture sprang up around it to include clothing, music and dance styles. Rap and hip-hop became a celebration of urban culture while still addressing many of the problems prevalent in that culture [7].

Rap began with DJs taking popular music, spinning the records to a rhythm, and mixing other music across while maintaining the rhythm. DJs would scratch records and make them skip to a beat, and they would also mix new tracks over popular music, creating new meaning and a new expressive form. Rap and hip-hop are cultures of appropriation and reconstruction. City kids could take popular music and return themselves, through mixing it up, adding new rhythms or adding new spoken word tracks over them.

The hip-hop culture flourished through its parties. People would gather in the same space to dance. DJs would take turns spinning. Bootleg copies of these performances were exchanged and finally, a few television networks like MTV and BET picked up on the movement and helped it spread internationally.

Of course, creating an international movement of young, full-contact poets is not within the scope of this thesis! A culture cannot just be manufactured in such a manner. It grows organically over a period of time through shared experiences and resonance. But the idea of culture must be addressed, even if it is only within the microcosm of a workshop with a small group of teenagers. Small groups create their own cultures, and these micro-cultures can and should be supported and encouraged.

1.3 technology and text

"Art has always been bound up with technology, and artists have always been among the first to adopt new technologies as they emerge. We monkey around with new technologies in an effort to see what they can do, to make them do things the engineers

never intended, to understand what they might mean, to reflect on their effects, to push them beyond their limits, to break them" [33].

Technology and text have been tied together for hundreds of years. The invention of the printing press, for example, has changed our relationship to text, our ways of interacting with it and the culture surrounding it. The printing press changed the world by making text accessible to most of the world, although it took time and filtered through society [20]. Poetry, which was once an oral tradition, became transcribed. The cultures of poetry and technology merged. Poetry became more accessible, although it remained a social event in which a reader would perform for an audience. As cultures shifted even more, poetry became more private. Many read poetry on the page instead of aloud, and poetry shifted to appeal visually as well as aurally.

With the advent of computers and word processing, writing styles changed even more dramatically. Writers could maintain multiple drafts of texts easily, making subtle changes, playing with spacing and layout. The act of "cutting and pasting" has become second nature to writers in the computer age.

Technology has also changed the way writers relate to one another. Online workshops have formed to take the place of traditional classroom workshops. Writers can share and critique each other's work online, at their convenience, instead of being bound by time and location. Poets come together across the world and countless people self-publish online or start their own poetry zines.

With the printing press, typography became an art form. With the computer, text moved off of the page, and its very nature was reconfigured. Static typefaces convey different

meanings and emotions. A number of studies regarding dynamic type have emerged from the MIT Media Lab [13, 14, 48, 55]. Yin Yin Wong, Peter Cho and David Small have all demonstrated ways in which text may be brought into a virtual space and how through highlighting, layering and various typographical effects, typography and navigation of text through space can enrich and demonstrate an understanding of that text [14, 15, 48, 55]. Chloe Chao created a visual programming language for designers to animate text [13].

Larry Friedlander of Stanford studied ways of bringing Shakespeare to life in the classroom. He saw the difference between how dramatic texts were treated in the theatre versus in the classroom. In the Shakespeare Project, students could animate cartoon figures to emulate blocking and navigate through recordings of Shakespeare scenes, which were cross-referenced with the original texts [22].

The Poetry Society of America sponsored a competition with a similar goal of encouraging students to engage poetry through media. In the Poetry in Motion Pictures competition, the PSA asked film students to interpret poems through short films [42].

The nature of poetry itself has changed with changing media and technologies. There are many examples of multimedia and hypertext poetry available online. Some pieces use abstract images and sounds to interact with the text, whereas others simply illustrate a given text [4-6, 11, 18, 23, 34, 43, 51, 52, 58]. Unfortunately, most of this work has been limited to adults who are experimenting with the poetic form and creating their own poetic communities. Children have not had much opportunity to play with digital media as a poetic tool.

The Full-Contact Poetry environment addresses this problem in that it is a tool for both construction and interpretation. Children can explore their relationships to some traditional poem written on a piece of paper, but can also create their own poetry. Again, making poetry does not necessarily mean in a traditional sense of writing something static using text. By giving children tools to manipulate and express through various media, I wanted children to create dynamic poetic expressions that could then serve as new objects of reflection.

1.4 overview

"The purpose of having a poet in a given class is not to produce thirty full-blown lifelong poets but to touch the kids with poetry, with a feeling for art that may grow from specifics outward for many years and affect many of their responses to daily things, that their lives may be open a touch more to inner and outer vividness" [16].

In this thesis I start by describing the Full-Contact Poetry environment and I discuss my design choices, some of which I have touched upon in this introduction. I continue with a discussion of the workshop in which many important issues were raised that fall under the following interconnected themes of:

- finding a voice
- creating a language
- and negotiating context.

The workshop was six-weeks long and during that period, I worked with a small group of teenagers. The experience required negotiations at many levels from our small group. Each member needed to find an individual voice both as part of the group and as a poet. We needed to create a language with which we could discuss the work that we were creating since the traditional language regarding poetry, or even workshops, did not quite apply. Finally, we were faced with new contexts. The workshop setting encouraged a classroom feeling, yet it was not a classroom. We were working with technology, but not in the way they were accustomed—likewise with poetry.

The themes of language, voice and context emerged at every level of the workshop in a very entangled way. I raise these themes here to offer another lens to the ones I present in the discussion of the workshop that follows. I hope that offering multiple lenses and frames can provide a deeper understanding of the complexity of the workshop and some of the many layers.

After describing the Full-Contact Poetry environment and setup of the workshop, I discuss the existing models and new paradigms that the workshop participants, including myself, confronted in order to explore our collective constructive processes. Each of us entered the workshop with models of what workshops mean, how computers are used and what art is about as opposed to technology. In our interactions, we challenged each other with our highly different models. To make the workshop work, we needed to either fit these new models into our existing mental models, or create new ones.

The second workshop section is called expressophobia and mathophobia. In *Mindstorms*, Seymour Papert describes a prevailing fear of math in popular culture. In the workshop, I was surprised to find a similar "expressophobia" amongst the children.

The children were hesitant to express themselves in the context of the workshop for various reasons, and much of the six-weeks was spent trying to understand this expressophobia and find ways to address and overcome it.

The following workshop section of the thesis addresses relationships, which were central to the workshop. Every aspect of the workshop depended on the relationships between individual children and me and between the children themselves. The workshop was a difficult experience for everyone involved because of the complicated issues of finding a voice, negotiating contexts and finding a language to discuss the experience. I credit the fact that the workshop held together to the relationships we built.

The final workshop section consists of a discussion of the entire project within the framework of construction, deconstruction, reconstruction and appropriation. The thesis ends by returning to the theme of voice and discusses some elements necessary to a workshop space that encourages both the participants and the facilitator to find their own voices. This is followed by an appendix, which documents the workshop in depth. I have also included a short overview of the workshop at the start of the appendix for quick reference.

2. design

2.1 background

The design of the Full-Contact Poetry environment was influenced by theories from many fields, ranging from learning, to literary theory, to those of individual poets who work with children in classrooms. The first is Seymour Papert's theory of constructionism, which states that knowledge is actively constructed, and that this construction can be mediated and facilitated [36]. However, Full-Contact Poetry is equally influenced by literary theory with its strong tradition in analysis and deconstruction. Deconstructing a piece enables one to understand and appropriate it, then respond creatively. The Full-Contact Poetry environment attempts a space between construction and deconstruction, so that children can engage in the dialectic process of building, taking apart and building, which emulates the cyclical process of writing/reading, discussing and writing/reading again.

In the Full-Contact Poetry environment, children either construct an interpretation of an already written poem (by a poet, a friend, or the child) or create an original poetic expression. Many poets who work with children ask the children to construct creative responses to poems that they have read [16, 25, 28, 29] as a way to understand the poems, to create relationships to them and to express themselves. The Full-Contact Poetry environment embraces this idea of having children create in response to a text. They can also, in the Shakespearean tradition, "act out" the text [48]. Finally, children can move away from prewritten texts and create original expressions.

While these actions by children are constructive, they contain the strong deconstructive message that text is not a static object. Sole deconstruction, or deconstruction as an end in itself, is a "dangerous" activity. As Zavatsky eloquently describes it:

> Would you discuss the movements of a ballerina by taking your students to an anatomy class and have them watch leg muscles being dissected? It might help to understand the twists and turns, but dead parts don't get up and dance. Neither does the poem after autopsy. The poetry-by-autopsy method may be seen in action in most high school English classes studying Shakespeare. The Bard is picked clean, and *Hamlet*, the fierce and philosophical dramatic poem, crashes to the stage in a pile of bones, all curiously resembling scansion marks [53].

But deconstruction does not have to be the destructive process described above. Two main ideas in deconstruction are that texts contain many meanings and influences and that text is a starting point for response [46]. Individual children can form relationships with texts, find their own meanings and create their own responses. A text does not exist as an end in itself, but as the beginning of a dialogue, the cycle between construction and deconstruction.

To facilitate this balance between construction and deconstruction, I wanted to create an environment with two parts: a space in which children can build and a space in which children can share, discuss, reflect and appropriate each other's work. The discussion space ideally would be online as well as face-to-face, so that children could post their poems and talk about them, even download and reconfigure each other's work.

Discussion is crucial to the process of writing and reading poetry, whether on the page or in full-contact form, since the process of getting inside of a poem is at least as interesting as the end product resulting from this process. Unless interpretations can be challenged, explored and explained, readers limit themselves and the depth of their understanding [46]. The richest, most rewarding discussion occurs when two or more people attempt to negotiate different understandings of the same poem. Once again, the text is teased apart, along with the individual constructions. One revisits the text with new eyes, changed eyes, which both reinforces and revises reconstructions. This collaboration also nourishes a poetic culture in which a community shares its experiences and encounters with poetic works and creates its own language of poetry.

In addition to reflecting on poetry, there is also the matter of reflecting on the act of writing itself. The poet Jack Collom, when teaching children to read and write poetry, encourages students to reflect on the act of writing poetry. Instead of asking them to write about poetry as a subject, which elicits declarative sentences such as "I like poetry," he asks them to write about "something palpable, something that moves." He wants children to build from what they know and feel to let them grow inductively from those familiars, instead of trying to break the complex into digestible pieces [16]. This idea is at the heart of Full-Contact Poetry: to let children encounter poetry as something that moves and dances, or that they can move and make dance. It is something concrete and real, which can touch and be touched, and very importantly, an experience that can be shared in a poetic culture where others share this new type of encounter with poetry.

In a web space, children can post their projects for other children to encounter and respond to either verbally or through another project. This cycle of constructing,

deconstructing, reconstructing and discussing gets to the heart of reading and writing. Children can post any sort of comments, from whether they liked a child's creation or disagreed with some aspect of the interpretation, to a deeper discussion of whether a project actually qualifies as a poem, or what qualifies as a poem. Is a poem only text? Does an original expression consisting of only sound and image qualify as a poem? There might also be discussions of "How did you come up with that interpretation? I always thought the poem meant ___!" Other engaging discussions occur when many children make interpretations of the same poem, then compare and try to reconcile the similarities and differences between their projects.

On the constructive side, I wanted to have a full programming environment for children in accordance with John Maeda's principle that artists should make their own tools instead of allowing their expression to be limited by given tools [32]. Designers make numerous assumptions when developing tools. My goal was to give children a tool for expression, not to limit their expression by my assumptions of what they would want to say and how. With this in mind, I went on to think about the other elements of the environment, planning that whatever I provided would be extensible by the children.

My primary focus in developing the environment was on dynamic and expressive text. Research from both the Visible Language Workshop and the Aesthetics and Computation Group at the MIT Media Lab demonstrate the power of expression contained within the simplicity of type combined with computation. Letters can convey emotions [14, 15]; words in motion depict particular interpretations of their meanings [55]. Even static text serves as an objectification of speech and thought, making the fragments of speech, words, "objects to think with" [35].

In making text an object to play with, words and the meanings they convey suddenly take on new meaning. In taking a poem apart word-by-word in order to animate it, children must slow down and take time to investigate phrases and their possible representations. How does one convey the meaning of a single word or move a word in a way that draws out its meaning or changes the interpretation of that word? What does a word look like? Is it angry or harsh or soft or active?

The second aspect of the environment is voice. Reading poetry aloud is a tradition. Poets often travel to give readings. People attend to see the poet, but also to hear the poet's version of his poetry. Speaking colors and interprets static text [41]. One speaks of "reading" into a poem, but never of "hearing" into one [44]. Actors practice numerous ways of speaking lines to find what most accurately represents the intents of their characters. Slam poetry depends on speaking; the performance is the interaction with the audience. Reconfiguring existing sound is also powerful, as demonstrated by DJ culture. Children should be able to work with existing sound, by sampling or other forms of editing, in addition to making their own sounds.

The third component in the environment is still image. Children should be able to add images that they make or other images, such as photographs. A child's way of constructing knowledge and meaning is through personal experience [36, 39], which can take many forms. Children's images, like their writing, can serve as poetry, another way of expressing self. The ability to draw over images, however, enables them to work with image in the way I hope they would engage with text and sound: they can reconfigure it in a way that makes it their own.

Malaguzzi described children as expressing themselves with a hundred languages [19]. The Full-Contact Poetry environment attempts to combine some of these languages into a new language of expression for children.

2.2 squeak

I began my search for the right software environment with certain qualities in mind. I had not decided whether I wanted to build my own system from scratch or use a finished product yet, but whatever programming language or environment I would use had to provide good control over multiple forms of media. The environment also had to be user-extensible so that children could define and add their own tools to the system instead of being bound to the tools I provided.

One of my first instincts was to use Macromedia's Flash, since it is a complete multimedia animation product for designers. While Flash handles multiple forms of media well, it is neither transparent nor easily extensible, especially for children. Most of the functions are pre-defined, although one can program supplemental scripts. There are numerous options available, an almost overwhelming amount. I wanted children to be able to define their own animations instead of using someone else's tool in order to slow down the process of creation so that they would take their time to think about what they were animating, why and how.

Logo was another option since I wanted a programming language for children. The Logo language is powerful because it has a low threshold of entry and a high ceiling in terms of capability. Unfortunately. Logo does not have a strong sense of object,

especially regarding media. Various types of media can be used in LCSI's Microworlds Logo, but their management is quite cumbersome. In addition, the various media are not easily programmable objects like the Logo turtle, and this makes management of multiple media difficult.

I finally decided to build the Full-Contact Poetry environment in Squeak, an open-source implementation of Smalltalk-80, written entirely in Smalltalk. I had many reasons for choosing Squeak as the programming environment. The first was that Smalltalk is a fully object-oriented environment. Lev Manovich highlights objects as the most important component of new media for art. It changes an art object from single instantiations to programmable pieces that are completely configurable, reconfigurable and manipulable [33]. In Squeak, absolutely everything is an object, from graphics to drawings made within the system. Every object in turn can be programmed.

Squeak also comes with an interface designed for children to write scripts, particularly around movement. This feature was crucial to me. A programming language would allow children to add their own tools to the palette I provided. Squeak's high-level scripting language seemed to meet this criterion. The programming happens by dragging and dropping commands into a sequence. New commands or scripts can easily be added into the system.

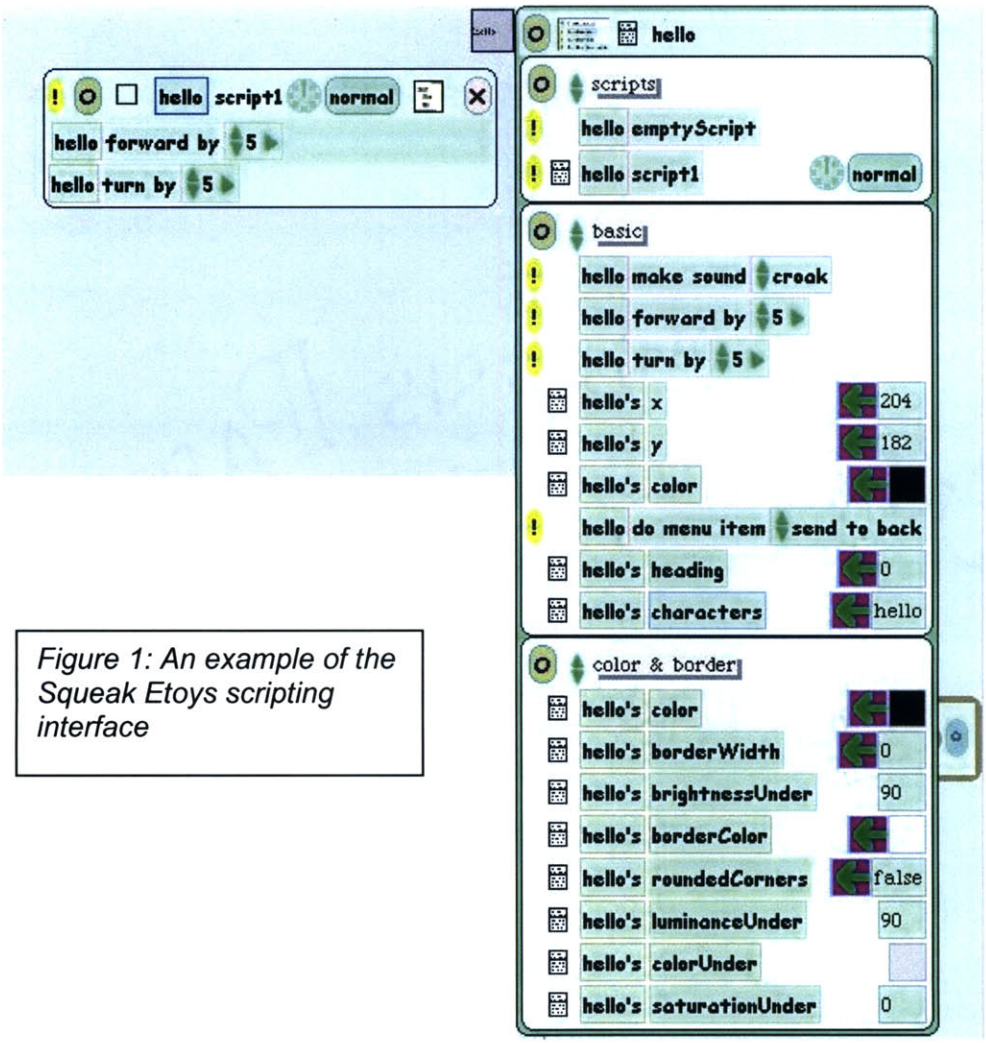


Figure 1: An example of the Squeak Etoys scripting interface

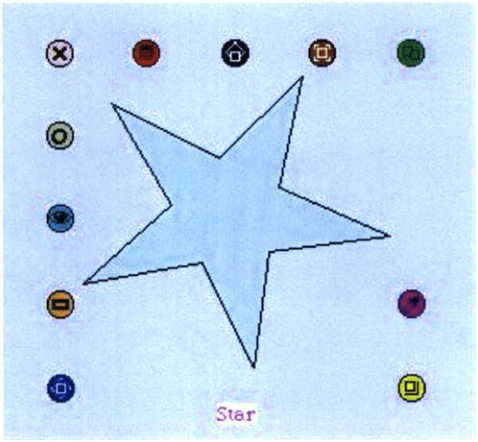
The Squeak environment is also well suited to multimedia applications. It supports a number of media types, from text and still image to various sound formats. Every media type in Squeak is an object and easily programmable.

Finally, there is a collaborative web environment called a swiki. Swikis are pluggable web servers that are written in Squeak. As with all Squeak environments, the web space is fully configurable. There are multiple versions of Squeak available, from the versions currently under development (3.1 beta, 3.2 gamma and 3.3 alpha) to a stable release (3.0) to a Plugin web version that also serves as a standalone environment.

With the Plugin, Squeak projects can be viewed through web pages. The swiki provides a space in which children can upload projects and create or modify web content. The swiki administrator can set varying levels of security for the swiki community.

Unfortunately, Squeak has a number of drawbacks. First of all, the many versions complicated matters. I decided to use the Plugin version because the web component of the project was important to me. This meant that I lost much of the functionality provided in later versions. Also, when I modified the Plugin version for the Full-Contact Poetry environment, the new Plugin version was not fully compatible with other Plugin versions, meaning that to view projects created in Full-Contact Poetry, one would need the appropriate files to view them. Second, the interface is difficult to navigate. In order to use the etoys system, which is Squeak's high level scripting language, users need to first select an object by either clicking on it with the middle mouse button or holding down the "Alt" key and simultaneously clicking on the object with the left mouse button on a PC. The object is then surrounded by a halo of buttons. Clicking on the cyan button with an eye on it brings up the scripting interface.

Figure 2: A star object with surrounding halo

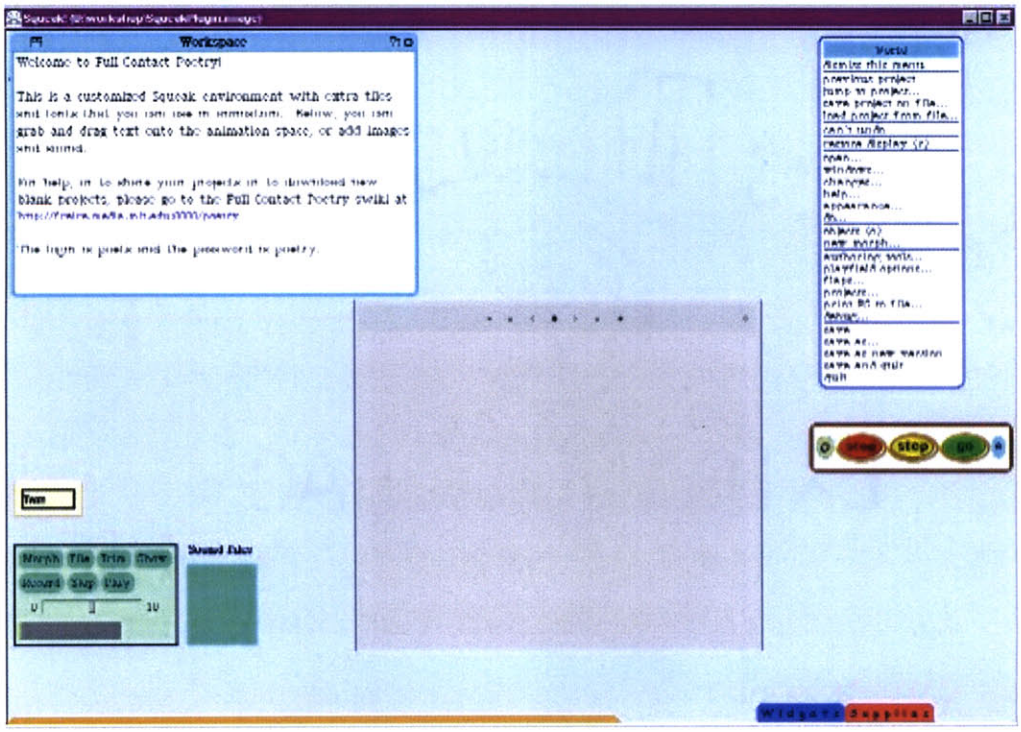


Unlike Logo, the Squeak interface is impossible to figure out without aid. Squeak is also poorly documented since it is under development and changing so rapidly, so it is difficult for new users and developers to understand how to program in it. However, Squeak has a strong and supportive user community. I would not provide Squeak alone as an environment for children (or adults!) to figure out, but since I knew I would be working directly with a group of children, I decided to use it despite its convoluted interface. In the end, Squeak's features outweighed its problems for my application.

2.3 environment

Since Squeak contains an overwhelming number of components, I wanted to keep a simple introductory interface. When children first open the Full-Contact Poetry environment, they see a window like this:

Figure 3: Opening screen



The upper left contains a welcome message and a link to the workshop's swiki. On the lower left are controls for recording sound, a place to store sound files and text objects that the children can drag into the animation space in order to rewrite and animate. The upper right contains a menu to save projects and import files. The lower right has a control panel that loops, stops or steps through every script open on the screen. A BookMorph, which is similar to a HyperCard stack, is in the center of the screen. A BookMorph consists of a series of pages, each of which can hold scripted objects. Children can either script objects on a single page to form an animation or they can program the BookMorph to automatically flip through pages when animations on each page finish, giving the effect of changing scenes.

Since Squeak only comes with four fonts, my first step was to add font choices to the system. Then I added in new tiles to the scripting area, mostly to give children more control over timing and invoking scripts for additional programming flexibility. I also set up a swiki for the project that had a group username and password. Everyone had read and write access, so anyone in the workshop could add to and change the swiki. I posted a blank version of the Full-Contact Poetry opening project files and documentation on the Full-Contact Poetry environment on the swiki. When a child finished a project, a new empty project could easily be imported. The swiki also contained a page of poetry links, both traditional and multimedia, as a set of examples and another page for favorite poems. Children could also add their own pages to display their projects or anything that they wanted to express.

2.4 workshop[1]

I advertised the Full-Contact Poetry workshop through the South End Technology Center @ Tent City in Boston, MA. The center's director, Mel King, and I arranged a six-week workshop at the center, which would meet two afternoons per week.

The center offers a number of computer classes for adults and activities for children, such as games design and robotics. Mel wanted to diversify the types of activities offered at the center, and as a lover of poetry, he agreed to this workshop. A week before the workshop started, I did a run-through of the environment with Mel and Beley, one of the center's staff. I spent the following week making adjustments based on their comments and difficulties and installed the software on some machines at the center.

I did not know how many children to expect—six had signed up, and Beley informed me that generally the workshops attract two to four participants. We expected some fluctuation over the first week or two before a stable group developed.

Although I was not sure of numbers, I had a plan. On the advertisement, I asked the children to bring their favorite song to the first session. We would play their favorite songs, talk about why they like the songs and then interpret the lyrics through animation—a first step towards full-contact poetry, or so I imagined.

The plan failed.

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[1] I have included a journal I kept of the workshop in the Appendix. In this chapter, I analyze and describe sections and events from the workshop. The journal provides a day-to-day description.

On the first day, only one person brought music, and he was willing to play it, but not talk about it. Every time I mentioned the word poetry, I was met with blank looks. I was nervous, not sure how to recover from a failed plan on the first day. I retreated to the technology, showed them how to import pictures, draw new pictures within the system and record sounds. We did some basic motion animation with the pictures they drew. Since we were using many types of objects, they downloaded and imported various images, which they also animated.

The group was responsive to the environment and liked being able to make things happen immediately. Despite a shaky start, Day One ended positively. I was, however, confronted with the realization that despite entering with plans, ideas, and visions of how the day would progress, the children had their own ideas [47] and the workshop needed a series of negotiations [12]. I needed to find a balance between encouraging children's expression and introducing a new tool. I had to find a way to balance teaching particular skills in the Squeak environment and letting the children play. We also had to define ourselves as a group. These negotiations involved our changing mental models of how the workshop, technology and group were "supposed" to be and creating a culture for our workshop in which children could express themselves freely and safely.

3. existing models, new paradigms

Piaget describes two ways that new knowledge becomes a part of an individual's mind: through assimilation and accommodation. In assimilation, the new knowledge fits into existing mental models, whereas in accommodation, new models must be built to accept that knowledge [39]. The workshop experience required a changing of models for both me and for the children. I had a few models already regarding workshops and how they work. The children had ideas both about how the environment should work and how computers should be used. All of these ideas changed over the course of the workshop, but took serious negotiation on all of our parts and caused frustration while we struggled.

3.1 workshops for art, workshops for technology

The Full-Contact Poetry workshop is the first workshop that I organized and ran alone. Prior to this workshop, I took part in a few workshops as a participant and helped facilitate others. These workshops can be categorized as "writing" workshops and "programming/robotics" workshops. When planning my workshop, I combined my past experiences with some of the ideas from Kenneth Koch regarding working with children and poetry [25, 28, 29] into what I thought would be an ideal mix, not realizing of course, that the children would have expectations as well.

The writing workshops in which I participated were as an undergraduate at Wellesley College. I took workshops in both poetry and creative writing. These courses were among the most difficult to get into of the courses offered by the English Department due to their popularity, which gives an indication of the perceived success by participants. Much of their success I credit to the open structures of the workshops and the professors' support of individual writing styles and desire to help students along their individual goals and abilities.

The poet Frank Bidart organized poetry workshops so that students would turn in nine poems by the end of the semester. These nine could all be revisions of the same poem, completely different poems or a combination of the two. He maintained this rule to ensure that the students wrote and rewrote throughout the term to get into the habit of writing poetry. He had deadlines by when each of the three sets of poems would have to be turned in, but they could be handed in earlier. Every class session, he would select some of the poems that had been turned in for the class to discuss. The poet whose poem was being discussed was not allowed to speak until after the discussion because Bidart wanted her to hear how others interpreted it without her interjecting or becoming defensive about the work. The class would discuss what they thought the poem was about, if they thought the poem effectively conveyed its meanings, how the sounds and imagery worked together, etc. At the end, the poet could speak, give her reactions to the discussion and share what she had been attempting in her poem. She could tell the story she was trying to convey, the emotions, in as much or as little detail as she wished. Sometimes the poet would just accept the comments and not respond; she was allowed to do whichever was more helpful and comfortable for her. Finally, the class could give her further suggestions for revision if any, taking her response into consideration.

Bidart also brought in poems by established poets when he thought they were relevant to the discussion of the day's poetry, or in response to the previous week's discussion. He met individually with the students as well, as part of the course, to give his feedback on the student's work instead of dominating the workshop time. He did this at least three times during the semester, more if the students wished. What I liked best about Bidart's style of teaching the art of writing poetry is that unlike some poets, he did not attempt to turn his students into pale echoes of himself. He encouraged students to find their own voice and had a remarkable talent for finding the core of a student's poem and then offering various suggestions for how to illuminate that core.

Patricia Powell, a novelist, ran a similar style of workshop for short fiction. Instead of requiring nine pieces or revisions, she asked for three stories in the span of a semester. Like Bidart, she would select a few pieces for each student to read and critique. Unlike Bidart, she would distribute stories for the next meeting at the end of a class so that students would have time to read and critique each story before discussing them, since each piece was significantly longer than a poem. The stories were discussed in class, although sometimes she would break us into smaller groups so that everyone's stories could be critiqued. Powell, also assigned books to read, some collections of short fiction, others full length novels. She selected authors with unique writing styles, some of whom tested the boundary between poetry and prose, such as Salman Rushdie, Carole Maso and Jeannette Winterson. In addition to discussing each other's writing, we would talk about the various books, whether or not we liked them and why.

I also read extensively about poetry workshops with children. The poet Kenneth Koch is most famous for his work with primary school children in New York. Koch worked with

many primary school children to teach them the canonical "great poetry." He taught by encouraging children to write poetry in styles similar to those of the poets so that the children, while expressing themselves, could gain some insight into the writing of the great poets and form a relationship with those poems. His work had a few great effects: the children were able to work with a poet in a poetic culture, they created a relationship to great poets, they expressed themselves originally and they developed a playful relationship to language. In this environment, children took risks with language in their poems, inventing their own writing styles in poems that dealt with their experiences. Koch's work with children helped them to both read critically and write expressively [25, 28, 29]. His work resonated with my vision of giving children an entry into poetry by letting them be creators and critics, only my workshop would use technology.

The “robotics and programming” workshops were a rather different experience for me on many levels. First, the activities were vehicles to discuss learning, ways of creating constructionist learning environments and how technology can be integrated into such a learning environment. The purpose of the workshops was not solely to build projects. Secondly, these workshops were much shorter, the longest lasting only two weeks, due to external constraints. This created an added pressure of trying to accomplish a lot—namely learning a technology, trying to create a constructionist learning environment and reflecting on both the technology and learning environment—within an abbreviated time frame. Finally, in the “technology” workshops, I played the role as one facilitator among many. My role was primarily to help familiarize participants with the technologies, as opposed to leading discussions regarding the learning aspects. I spent most of my time circulating through a room in which participants worked on projects, offering individual help to those who requested it. This role colored my experience of the workshop.

Unlike a writing workshop in which all of the participants at least know how to read and write, in the "technology" workshops, many of the participants were new to programming, or at least to the programming environments we used. Our first step as facilitators would always be to help people navigate the space and figure out how to make something happen immediately. When using Logo, we'd start simply with directing the turtle, the basic object of programming, to move forward, backwards, right and left. Next we would move on to animation. With robotics, we would show people how to turn motors on and off and how to take sensor readings. To help get participants started on projects, we would often present challenges, such as design a car to climb the steepest possible ramp. This differed from the writing workshops in which I participated, where we were never given challenges or starters. We entered with a few examples of our own writing, and with numerous experiences with other poems, short stories and novels.

Another difference is that in a programming or robotics workshop, we discuss the attributes of a project, how it works and hypotheses as to why it does or does not work. These conversations do not happen in the form of a critique, which is particular to discussions of art. In evaluating art, the simple test of “does it work?” does not apply. Many evaluations attempt to quantify art numerically or translate a subjective experience into an objective fact [37, 38]. Of course, this is not possible. Instead, group critiques are used in evaluation and discussion.

In the robotics and programming workshops, we have tried to bring in some aspects of expression, such as building kinetic structures or making Claymation in Logo. While these activities generate enthusiasm and make the ideas of programming and robotics more compelling to some people, the conversations about the projects in my experience have never reached the level of a true critique. No one addresses how effectively or

completely a Claymation story is told. The general concern is how to expose the workshop participants to deeper programming concepts within the short workshop period and how to translate experiences in an open learning environment with technology into concrete discussions about changes in education. Despite expressive elements, the technology workshops remained focused on technology and learning. The writing workshops never approached the idea of technology beyond using word processing to maintain multiple drafts. I had never experienced a workshop that integrates meaningful ideas from art and technology.

I wanted my workshop to have a balance between the two types of workshops, since I was teaching the children a new programming environment but also wanted them to create full-contact poems. Ideally, the children would create projects, similar to those created in programming and robotics workshops, and they could critique each other's pieces as in writing workshops. As in the writing workshops, I wanted the children to have the freedom to create and express anything that they wanted.

I did not think the structure of the workshop would cause much difficulty since I had so many models to select from, but the situation was completely different with this particular group of children and with the tools involved. None of my models fit the workshop situation well enough. As with the programming and robotics workshops, the children needed to learn a new tool and needed a certain amount of instruction as to how to navigate the environment. I also wanted them to create, however, which is where much of the difficulty arose. We had six weeks for the children to learn a tool well enough to use it for self-expression.

In writing workshops where participants are already fluent with the reading and writing, it takes months or even years for students to find their voices, figure out how they express themselves and what they wish to express. Students, while fluent in the language of reading and writing, still have to learn the language of poetry, the language of expression [26]. Similarly, a dancer or an actor can train and go through the motions for years and a painter can mimic other artists to learn technique before they find the spark that allows them to communicate themselves through the medium. While the intent of the workshop was not to develop full-fledged artists, the children still were not comfortable enough with the tool to jump in and experiment.

In my personal model of the workshop, I did not allow the children time to develop the tool before jumping into expression. I showed the children how to use some of tools during the first few days. I wanted them to explore expression while learning the tool, although much of this led to frustration because the children were not yet comfortable with either expression or the tool.

As the workshop progressed, I was forced to change my model and make something new from my previous models. The synthesis that I had imagined did not work. The workshop was too vague for the children; they were floundering in a vacuum.

In my combination of technology and writing workshops, I took the introduction of tools from the technology workshops and kept all of the openness of what one actually makes with the tool of the writing workshop. There were two problems with this decision. First, the children, just learning the tool, were not comfortable enough to express themselves through it. The second was the children had signed up for the workshop because it sounded interesting, not because they wanted to be full-contact poets. Unlike a typical

writing workshop, they did not have stories or poems at hand. I needed to step in and help them figure out what they wanted to make, even whether they wanted to interpret an existing poem or make something new.

Poets such as Kenneth Koch and Jack Collom worked with primary school children and introduced exercises, similar to those used in art classes, to inspire the children. They gave the children models and structures based on writers [16, 28]. While their exercises were not appropriate for high school children, they provided ideas for the types of examples and exercises I could use. It was analogous to the programming or robotics challenges, some concrete themes to spark ideas. I had to modify the exercises to fit the tool and context, so I could not just recycle established exercises, but had to develop a set of my own, appropriate for high school children expressing themselves through animation.

3.2 how computers are used

One of the oppositions I faced from the children was their prior experience with computers. The group with whom I was working was quite computer savvy. The children had email, regularly surfed the web and found games or music videos by their favorite artists. Most of them were regulars at the center and had participated in the games design and robotics workshops. Their very computer literacy closed them off from the activities I was proposing. They saw the computer as a particular type of tool, and this tool was not expressive. My challenge was to give them a new frame of reference without being too constrictive—letting them see a new idea without giving them a strict

model to replicate. But how could I help them construct this new frame of reference when the underlying ideas were new to them?

I tried at first to bridge the gap through description, and then through a couple of examples. I was afraid of providing too many examples because I thought that the children would just replicate what I showed them. I wanted to leave the workshop very open to see what they would come up with. I made some Squeak examples of full-contact poetry, then told them to go for it. I quickly realized that only giving a few examples encouraged direct, mindless replication much more than if I presented a wide range of examples. With multiple examples, the children could at least find something that resonated with them to replicate and build from. Also, if I did not give them models to reproduce, they still reproduced what they knew to make. On the first day, two of the children used the animation space to create anime style animations. Others wanted to use the programming environment to write games.

I found multimedia poetry on multiple websites and showed those to the group. Some contained an abstract mixture of images and words, whereas others created straightforward illustrations of a narrative. I sought a mix of abstract and straightforward pieces, some which used sound and image to highlight different meanings than the text [4-6, 11, 18, 23, 34, 43, 51, 52, 58].

Mike, one of the students in the group, did not visibly react to the poetry examples. I had trouble seeing if he understood or had any opinion of what I was showing him, but immediately after I stopped taking him through some examples, he started a creation with a series of images, text and later sound. Jennifer and Beley, two more of the group, both expressed surprise at many of the pieces and I could see them take in this new way

of using a computer. They paused, nodded their heads a bit, asked questions, then returned to their computers to start different project work. Beley began a project that was solely text animation. He animated the word "Hello," written in festive fonts and colors, to start in different places then swing into position. Earlier, he had just asked questions about games and how to program various test conditions to make a simple game. He came up with this idea immediately after viewing some examples.

I also saw a parallel to Kenneth Koch's work. Koch discusses teaching reading and writing as a single subject, not drawing a distinction between the two [28]. I realized I had probably inadvertently reinforced the dichotomy between technical aspects of animation and expression in the first session when my poetry discussion failed and I jumped into the tool. I knew I had to find ways to introduce new techniques as a part of eliciting expression.

Providing examples sparked the first round of projects, but only the first set. After the group finished their first projects, we were at a bit of an impasse. The children appeared to feel that they had exhausted the environment, tools and possibilities. They were stuck and did not have any new ideas or enthusiasm for new projects, nor did they want to keep editing their first projects. They had completed nice initial projects, but how could I push their expression further? I did not want them to make projects for the sake of learning the environment, the environment was not the end goal, but I did want them to learn the environment for the sake of expressing themselves. How could we turn this misconception around?

I tried to step away from the computer to encourage expression instead of technology. We talked about different technologies and their uses, such as a pen and paper, which

can be used to solve equations, write essays, draw pictures, write stories, play games, etc. A computer could also be used for many ends. In the meantime, we sat outside with colored pencils, crayons, markers and sketchpads. Again, the children drew single pictures, announced that they were finished and looked at me expectantly. I asked them to think about a next project. I opened up media options so that they would not feel bound by the computer—I asked about music, writing, drawing, anything—I asked them to make a project for a person that they care about. Still, an impasse. I wanted to push the idea of the computer as just another tool for expression, but the space I was providing was still too unfamiliar and overwhelming for them to express themselves.

3.3 classrooms and workshops

One of my largest crises during the workshop was trying to figure out how to negotiate constructionist ideas with the workshop environment. I had difficulty resolving the idea of a constructionist thesis workshop; it felt like an oxymoron. The workshop, because it was for my thesis, had inherently non-constructionist elements, such as the children would work almost exclusively with my environment. Part of my motivation for pursuing full-contact poetry was to broaden the palette of constructionist tools available from primarily addressing math and science learning to incorporating arts and expression. Forcing children to use this environment went in the opposite direction, narrowing the scope to arts and expression when they wanted to work with games programming. I was attempting to elicit poetry without imposing it. I wanted the children to express themselves, but one cannot force that. How could I balance asking the children to make what they're interested in with the fact that I wanted them to build full-contact poems and not games?

Since the center already had courses on games design, the children expected similar activities. They, despite signing up for a "Full-Contact Poetry Workshop," expected a teacher who would show them how to program games in another environment. I tried to resolve constructionism and my goal of widening the available set of constructionist tools to allow multiple voices to express themselves with the fact of workshop, where I had a new tool, but I was asking for certain types of expression.

Then there was the problem of the children's expectations. They were expecting a traditional setting, with me as a teacher and them following my instruction. On the first day, they sat in a row at their computers and waited for me to tell them what to do. I asked them to bring their chairs into a circle and started the workshop by talking to them, which elicited hesitant following. The children slowly moved into the circle, still mostly maintaining their row, but moving the chairs closer to my direction. When the attempted conversation fell flat, I let them return to their computers and retreated to "teacher mode." I taught them how to navigate Squeak, but frustrated them by refusing to give them assignments. Jennifer asked me repeatedly to just tell her what to do and she would do it, but I kept returning the question to ask her what she wanted to do, and I tried to brainstorm with her about project possibilities. The tension here was between my desire to meet the children's expectations and wanting to maintain my methods. I needed some bridge. I did not want them to mindlessly follow and copy whatever I did, but how could I stimulate their ideas when I was behaving in a manner so foreign for a teacher? This conflict started to settle itself as I worked with individual children to try to understand their interests and the types of projects they would like to build.

I needed to find a balance between teaching a new tool and leaving space for expression as well. On the first day, I instructed, which was fine because the children wanted to get started in the environment and needed guidance in order to learn how to program. It was also an environment that they expected. I was afraid of falling into that trap, though, because instructing, in some ways, is much easier than creating an open environment with confused and potentially bored children. I could easily have entered the workshop every day with a lesson plan, a set of programming skills for the day and an outline of projects I wanted the children to complete. However, I was interested in the children's expression and wanted to encourage their individual voices, not shut them down with my direction. I was caught in a paradox of opening a space for expression while the children needed definition regarding the tool and the idea of full-contact poetry. Added to this were my newness and unorthodox "teaching" methods.

When working with individual children, I had some trouble initially determining when to give what information—how to balance instruction with problem solving. Of course in the beginning I showed them elements of Squeak and how to write programs, but later, as they started to write their own animation scripts, I could not just tell them how to do everything.

This was made more complicated because they were working with new tools. When they had something to express or animate, they wanted to be able to do it immediately, without going through the intermediate and sometimes frustrating steps of scripting the actions. In certain situations, emphasizing expression became more important than the scripting. In other situations, the scripting did not really require outside help and the children were just trying to get me to do it for them. The hard part was figuring out which situation was in front of me and how to respond and step through scripting with someone

while still allowing the child to try scripts and debug them without too much frustration. Most of this occurred by talking through problems and steps, so the child made the actual decisions, while we talked out what the commands would do and possible bugs.

Another problem, which surprised me greatly, was that of propriety. The children, especially in the beginning, regarded me as a teacher figure, and later as an older sister, not an other like a teacher, but still a figure with some authority. I realized that in my selection of examples of slam poetry, contemporary poetry and new media poetry, I had been extremely safe.

Sylvia Ashton-Warner in her work with Maori children and Kenneth Koch in his work with elementary school children both commented on safe and stale reading materials that turn children off to literature. Ashton-Warner's Maori children struggled to read *Dick and Jane* readers, but when they were able to write their own stories about sex, violence and things that frighten them, the children were engaged and loved written language. This was their entry into literacy—writing about what moved them [3].

I knew I could not rob my group of real experiences and emotion, turn them off to poetry as happens so often. I had to negotiate my role as "teacher" first, however. I knew that they viewed me as a teacher still, and I did not want to expose them to ideas that they "shouldn't" know or think about. I realized what I was doing when talking to a group of girls after the second day of workshop. Jennifer and her younger sister Teresa were there, ages sixteen and ten. Jennifer talked about how her father was the only man her mother had ever married and Teresa protested, "She married my father, too!" Jennifer laughed a little and said no, then changed the subject as she saw Teresa was getting

upset. I could see that Teresa did not fully understand what Jennifer was saying, but had enough idea to get upset.

After the conversation I realized a few things. First, I was falling into stereotyped behavior of trying to protect childhood innocence, which for the most part, does not exist [2]. Second, I realized that this conversation could only have happened after five o'clock, when the workshop had ended, but not "during class time." I was falling into the ritual.

Since the center is under Mel's direction, I spoke with him about what was considered appropriate. I may have certain standards of what children may discuss and express, but I did not want to cross Mel's boundaries for his center. Mel explained that they do not encourage swearing at the center, but as long as the material did not put anyone down, it was okay. He understood that many poems and examples might deal with "adult" issues. With the issue clarified, I never ran into the problem of censorship again during the workshop sessions.

Much of my work with Jennifer and our evolving relationship exemplifies the types of problems we had reconciling the workshop I wanted to run with the classroom they expected. On the first day, Jennifer called me "Miss." Every time she wanted my attention, she raised her hand, waved, and called, "Miss!" I had never encountered anything like it before. She looked at me as a teacher. I looked at her as though she were from another planet and tried not to jump every time she called me that. I wanted to break this habit first thing so that she would stop seeing me as some nameless other.

As we chatted and got to know each other better, she stopped calling me "Miss." She saw me as Anindita, someone more like an older sister figure than a traditional teacher. She treated me with respect, although she teased and tested me regularly, and talked to me about whatever was on her mind.

Where we struggled was in expression. I knew that she enjoyed drawing, but I could not get Jennifer to make anything in the Squeak environment. Every time we talked about possible project ideas, she asked, "What do you want me to do?" to which I would return, "Well, what do you want to do?" She would sigh and say, "Why can't you just tell me what you want me to make and I'll make it."

This lasted through the entire workshop.

I thought that giving her a starting point might help. I gave Jennifer a stack of poems and examples, asked her if she wanted to interpret any of them. She started with one slam poem, decided it was too difficult, then switched to a Shel Silverstein poem that was shorter and much simpler.

She fairly literally, but nicely, made an animated version of the poem, announced she was done, and asked what I wanted her to do next. Her project was pretty, thought out, and completed what I had asked in making an animated version of a poem. The code was complex at points, but otherwise she mostly substituted images for certain words and animated text into place. The project did not have much to do with Jennifer, though, or any of her interests, which was what I had been hoping to elicit from poetry interpretations, although it was a nice first project.

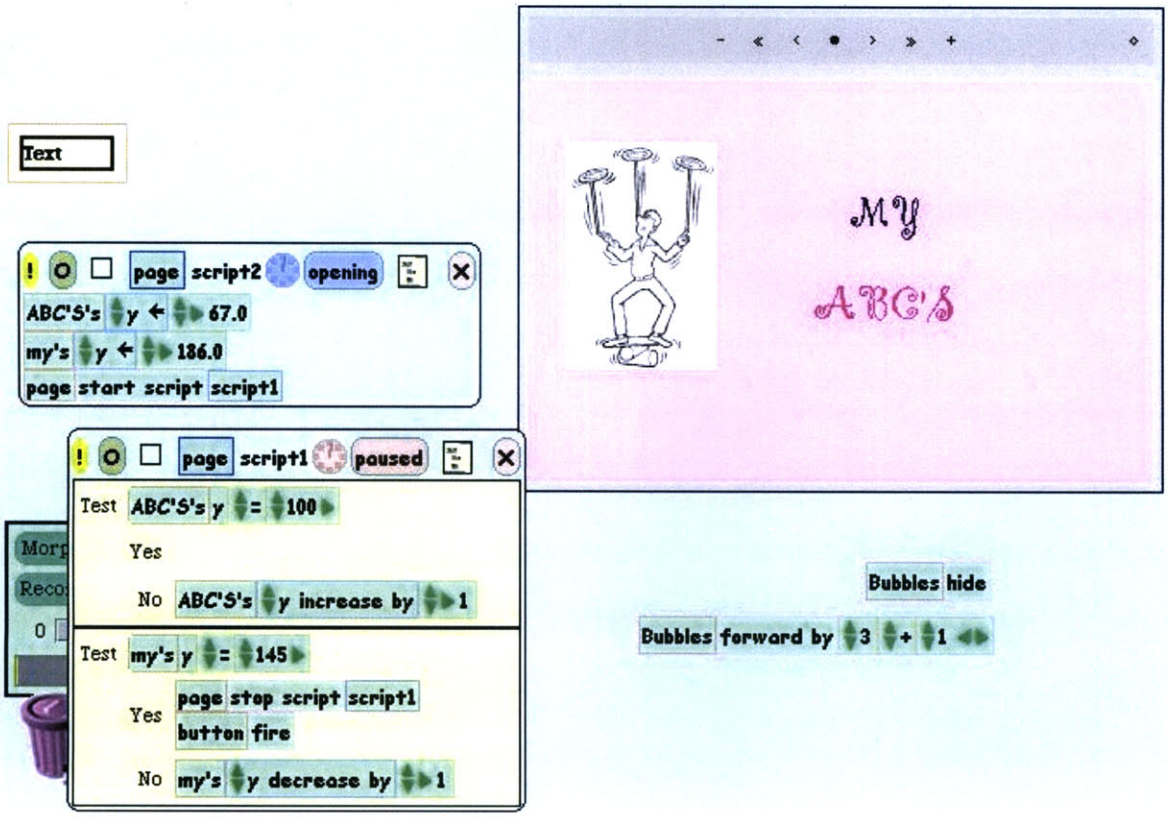


Figure 4: Balancing my ABC's

In contrast, Shawna never asked me what to make, she only asked how. It seemed that I had two extremes: Shawna who had numerous ideas, but missed a few sessions and did not know how to use Squeak as well, and Jennifer, who wrote the most complicated code of the group, but had no idea what to make.

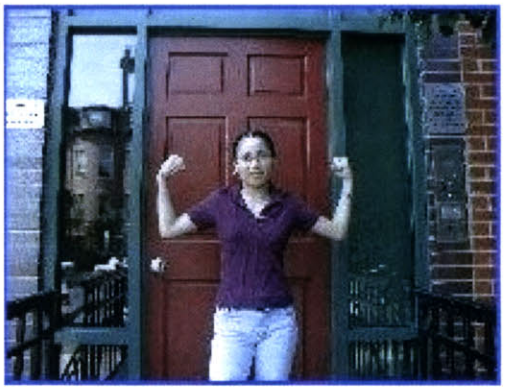
Jennifer was also extremely self-critical and easily frustrated. When making animations, she would refuse to draw new images, saying she could only draw by hand and not on the computer. She would import images from Google searches, but many times she could not find the pictures she wanted, in which case she would quit the project entirely and start another "easier" one.

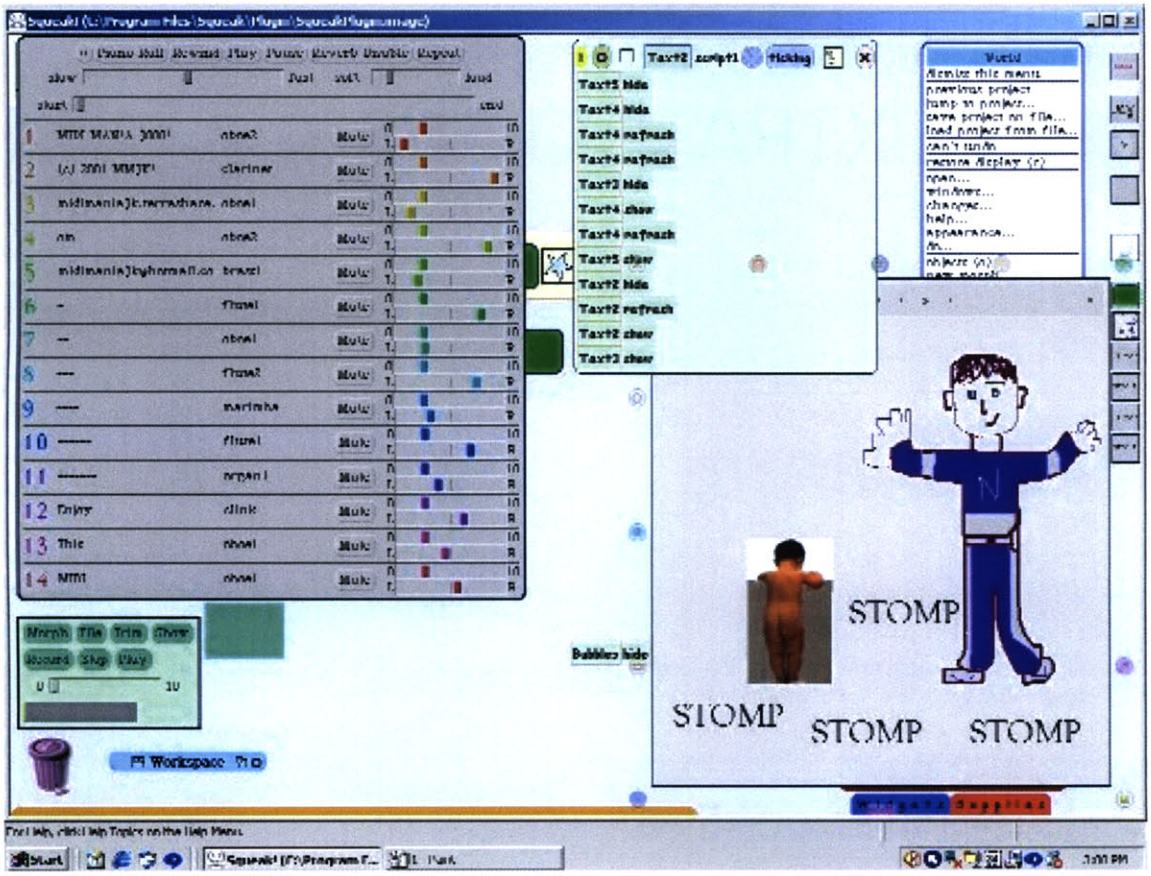
She is very down-to-earth, rejecting fanciful poems or narratives for "real" ones, so I tried to make connections between poetry and the present. I suggested she use the center's digital camera to take pictures and make a project based on those. She agreed, took pictures, but then disliked every photograph and deleted each one. I asked her if she wanted to learn to take photos or edit them in Photoshop and was met with another "No."

While Jennifer never cringes from expressing herself in conversation, she lets everyone know exactly what she thinks and why, she could not translate that into full-contact poetry. The context for expression was too different. She kept trying to guess what I wanted and could not make a bridge between what she wanted and what she imagined I wanted. As we moved more into friendship and out of the "classroom" environment, she also started getting more silly, expressive and original in her work.

In the fifth week, we played with midi sound files, modifying songs and making animations to them. Jennifer picked a song, played with it, then asked what I wanted her to make to the song. As usual, I threw out some ideas for directions she could take and asked her what the song meant to her and how she could show that. For the first time, she really made her own piece. I took a photograph of her and she made a superhero self, the survivor, to accompany the song "Survivor" by Destiny's Child. She also kept her regular, untransformed self and had that self confronted with a man who was attacking a baby. In her narrative, she transformed to the superhero self and saved the infant.

Figure 5: Jennifer before the transformation and a man attacking an infant





Jennifer's expression opened up through our continued conversations and relationships. As she got to know me as someone she could trust, she took more risks in her work, as long as only I would see her projects and not anyone else. Jennifer wanted to do what the teacher wanted to see. She copied some of the animations that I had used in an example and continuously asked what I wanted. In the end, I gave her an assignment,

as she had requested, and while I gave her fairly strict rules to follow, she could do anything within that space. Somehow we reached a balance between classroom expectations and workshop openness.

4. expressophobia and mathophobia

"You can feed and clothe a person, but to what end? The arts are where we discover and express our humanity, privately or collectively. They provide us the tools to share our common joy and grief, to find communion with each other, to pass our stories from one generation to the next. If everything is taken from us but life itself, what remains?" [37]

The most startling aspect of the workshop for me was to encounter the children's unwillingness to express themselves. Part of the problem, as I have mentioned, was attempting to bridge the gap between computers and expression while opening up a new area in which the children could work. There was also the problem of context: the children did not see the workshop environment, which initially seemed "schoolish," as a place for self-expression. Another part of the problem, which I had not expected, was that the children were not used to being asked to explicitly express themselves [27]. Growing up and even in college, everyone I encountered had some hobby—whether dance, theatre, writing, painting, playing in a band or drawing comic books. When I asked this group what they liked to do in their free time, I received responses like "ride bikes" and "play video games." Only Jennifer liked to draw. Beyond this, however, was the problem of safety. A few situations drove home how important it was to create a safe environment in which the children could feel comfortable expressing themselves. This meant trusting me, trusting each other and putting themselves on the line.

My first example of safety was Mike. On the first day, I introduced the children to how the swiki works. Most of them made simple pages and wrote "Hello" or "Waz up." Mike started to write something more on his page. It rhymed and had attitude, but as soon as others caught me looking, they leaned over to look and he erased it.

In another example, the group sat outside talking and drawing during our "non-computer day." Ron was drawing Wolverine, from the comic series X-Men. As a school bus pulled up, he handed me the picture and said, "I'm done." A child a few years younger came by and said, "I didn't know you draw." Ron said, "I don't." The child retorted, "But I saw you drawing." "Nah," Ron ended. When the child left, Ron reclaimed the sketchpad and finished his drawing. Expression, at least in this context, was neither safe nor "cool." It belonged in a separate space.

Jennifer, I realized, despite all of her self-confidence in conversation, also behaved like Mike and Ron. She criticized and deleted all of her work before anyone else could criticize it. She took photographs, and then deleted them without allowing anyone to see them. She stuck to safe projects, safe poems and animations. In conversations outside of the workshop, she spoke about her personal experiences, her family and her culture, but none of this translated into her full-contact poetry. Part of this, I am sure, resulted from the context of conversation versus classroom, but her extreme self-criticism and habit of hiding her computer screen as she worked suggested fear as well.

During the fifth week, I only had the girls. Jennifer worked on her "Survivor" project, the first project in which she included herself. When we first discussed incorporating a picture of her making muscles, she said no. I told her that no one would see it except for

me; she did not have to show her project to anyone. We stepped outside and took the picture.

When she saw the picture, she changed her mind, decided she did not like it and wanted to delete and take others. Having seen how her perpetual deleting of photographs leads to no photographs whatsoever, I asked her if she really thought we'd take any better pictures. "No," she admitted, so we resized the photo to a smaller, more comfortable size (i.e. less visible) and she imported it into her project.

She made a superhero version of herself and explained all of the parts to me. Superhero Jennifer had long hair "but I didn't brush it so it's nappy" and a pink hula skirt "showing I'm from Puerto Rico and I like to dance." She chattered about the various modifications she had made and what they said about her, then continued with her narrative.

Figure 6: Jennifer transformed

That day was the first time that instead of ending promptly at five p.m., she lost track of time and kept working on her project. Jennifer finally found a way to express herself.

Neither Mike nor Ron was there that day, and Beley did not participate in the workshop. Only Shawna, Jennifer and I worked and had a "girls' day." None of the boys peeked at her project. Shawna was busy making her own and at one point, shared her work with Jennifer and me. Jennifer, in turn, explained her work to Shawna.

At one point, Gilbert, who works at the center, saw what Jennifer was working on. He laughed at her narrative, so I threatened that if he was not careful, she would incorporate him and have her superhero self go after him in her narrative. Jennifer backed this claim immediately and said she would have her bad guy stomp all over him instead. It turned out to be a good way of turning things around so she did not feel uncertain or bad about her work and instead went on the offensive. Instead of hiding what she was doing, she went back to it with a vengeance, until past five o'clock.

Much of the safety of the workshop environment stemmed from the same source as much of the fear: teasing. I tried to build relationships with the individual children so that we could trust each other in the workshop space [10]. The basis of many of these relationships was the ability to tease each other. It helped move me out of the teacher role and into a friend and mentor role. At the same time, the children were afraid of how others would react to their creations. Ron hid his work from a child a few years younger, Mike removed his writing from the view of Ron and Jennifer and Jennifer criticized her work thoroughly and destroyed it before anyone could even think of reacting.

Working with the children individually, they were able to trust that I would not make fun of their work, I would not judge whether they were right or wrong, good or bad, but try to find ways to add to them or brainstorm on new directions. As our personal relationships solidified and the children realized that they were doing different work, they began to

compare their projects. Shawna's mother stopped by the center and Shawna showed her mother her work. Mike showed everyone his full-contact poem. Jennifer stopped hiding her work and immersed herself in it.

In many ways, this process was a function of time. By the end of the workshop, much of the self-expression, the true full-contact poetry, was only just beginning.

This fear that the children revealed can be called "expressophobia," similar to the "mathophobia" that Papert discusses in Mindstorms [36]. In the workshop, the children hesitated when they were faced with putting themselves in positions of vulnerability to their peers. They did not want their creations to be laughed at. Many adults also fear expression, such as poetry and art, in the way Papert describes fear of math—they are afraid that they will not understand expression and are afraid to look or feel stupid. The children I worked with did not face too much frightening poetry, although I gave them many different examples of writing. What interested me was that instead of tackling the contemporary poetry, they immediately looked through the slam poetry and works by Shel Silverstein, which appear easier and more immediately accessible. I did not push them into poetry because I did not want to reinforce any ideas of inadequacy, of "How come I don't get what this is trying to say?" and instead let them read through for themselves and choose what seemed to resonate. If one poem did not make sense and some other did, maybe it was the fault of the poet for being obscure and not of the reader for being too dense.

I chose Shel Silverstein because children love his poetry and many of the jokes make more sense to adults. Silverstein plays between text and image so the images add layers of meaning not explicitly written in the text. His writing and drawings are playful, a

kind of fun, ordinary experience. Adults who fear poetry and young children seem to distinguish between two kinds of poetry: Poetry with a capital "P" and poetry. The high and mighty Poetry terrorizes students in English classes, where for some unknown reason, curriculum still demands this archaic form of torture, and intimidates adults who still feel that it is something one should know for culture. In the meantime, children play everyday with the lowercase variety, which mixes in as simply another part of life [9], one of hundred languages children use to express themselves [19].

Papert's mathophobics view Math as abstract, difficult and hard to relate to and understand personally—at least the way that it is traditionally transmitted. Papert describes this math as "denatured." Poetry receives similar treatment, with emphasis on analysis and finding "the" meaning. Math and poetry are both dissociated from the concrete, personal relationships one can form with the material.

The joy of reading and writing poetry is grounded in emotion, the personal connection one makes with a piece. Unfortunately, this initial connection is oftentimes overlooked in a preoccupation with meaning and critical analysis. This is not to say that poetry or art is devoid of analysis and deep thinking, or that math and science lack emotion and aesthetics; the separation between feeling deeply and thinking critically is a false, albeit popular, one [17]. However, when solely analyzed, words are stripped of their passion—their appeal—instead of nurturing the love of words critical to a writer. In reading a text, one finds oneself within the writing [57]. In writing, one expresses that self.

In some ways, I was lucky that the children did not fully associate full-contact poetry with Poetry. On the first day, after being met with so many blank looks whenever I used the word, I changed my language to "expression." The children, instead of applying their

poetic prejudices (many times justifiable ones!) to their ideas of how computers can be used, only had to deal with their fear of peer criticism.

Their expressophobia was different from mathophobia in that children were not afraid of Expression in the way that many adults fear Math and Poetry. They shared a similarity in that their fear of expression reflected on their self-confidence, as with mathophobics. The question was not so much about ability, they knew that they could express themselves, they knew that they could make things, they knew they had the ability once we negotiated what full-contact poetry was, but the fear was, "What will other people think of me?"

Since this fear seemed so prevalent and remained unspoken, I did not push the idea of critique. Instead, I met individually with the children regarding their work, gave feedback which involved mostly support for their ideas and enthusiasm about some cool animation, image or song, and then made some suggestions for how to take the project deeper. We discussed different directions a narrative may take or alternate ways of representing an idea. Much of my work, I felt, was to try to bolster their self-confidence. While I would give them some criticism, for the most part, I tried to encourage more expression and more experimentation.

5. relationships

Relationship was the thread that held the workshop together at many points. One of my first realizations when I started the workshop was that how the children felt about me would determine everything. It would decide whether they wanted to work with me or try to undermine the space in various ways. It broke down our teacher-student barrier and allowed the children to see me as a real person. In an environment where vulnerability was one of the biggest concerns, the children's relationships to me and to each other could make or break the space. If they teased each other meanly, no one would feel comfortable about creating, let alone sharing work. However, most of the children already knew each other and had established teasing relationships with each other. If teasing were not allowed, the space would feel artificial. I worked to try to get to know each of the students, especially the ones that were least receptive to the idea of full-contact poetry, and at those times, it was the relationships that we were building that let us get past the frustration of the workshop and back into a space where we could work together.

All of the workshops in which I have participated as a facilitator, I have been present as part of a team. There was always at least one other person, so I did not feel the pressure or attention of being the sole facilitator. I never considered my popularity as an important factor in the workshop experience.

When the group met my comments about poetry, my passion, with blank looks, I was stunned. I did not know how to reach out to them to convey my enthusiasm. I retreated

into formality, creating a safe distance between the participants and myself. At that point I realized that I was the facilitator, not one of the group, some sort of other, and the group was measuring up my environment, my ideas and me.

Part of this measuring was due to our different expectations. The group expected a teacher in a classroom, and I was a facilitator in a workshop. My first step was to lay out the structure of the workshop, which included interrupting and asking questions at any point, to me or anyone else, unlike most classroom situations. I was not meeting their expectations of "teacher," so we had to re-negotiate our relationship.

As the facilitator, I was still an "other." I had some authority, but how much? I had some strange, sort of interesting ideas, but did they want to be a part of it? What did they think of me as a person? I was not very structured, and wanted to talk as a group initially. What was that all about? Did I know what I was doing?

When we settled into working with the software environment, the relationship became a little easier. This was expected—sitting in rows, learning particular skills. Teachers act in such a way, and it seemed that I actually did know something. Whenever something went wrong in one person's program, I was able to fix it, debug it, step them through the problem. When they wanted to make something happen, I could help them figure it out. Technical knowledge established.

The group began to play around, and as they played, they started to tease and harass each other. They gently mocked each other's drawings and animations, and as they teased each other, I dropped my formality and joined in, defending someone here, teasing another there and generally making sure no one was left at the losing end.

Some of the teasing was done to see how I would handle it. I showed them how to work with the swiki, add in their own pages, modify pages, and Jennifer started to rename other people's pages and change the text they had written. When I asked her to stop, she ignored me. When I asked her to stop by teasing her, dropped the formality and joined the fray, she laughed, but complied.

The simple act of teasing was my way of establishing both authority and likeability, especially since I wanted any authority to come from expertise and likeability, not the workshop environment. I did not want to be "the teacher," some form of other, but a part of the group, where we could talk to each other and work together. Teasing, of course, does not work with everyone. I came from an environment in which my friends and family constantly tease each other. It was natural for me to engage the children in a similar manner, especially since that was how they engaged each other. Of course none of the teasing was very personal, everything remained on a light level to make sure no one's feelings were hurt. The teasing, of course, could cut both ways since the children were afraid of their peer's teasing regarding their work. I found that I could tease them about certain aspects of their work, in the form of a light critique or light suggestion. Mostly regarding their work, I gave them a lot of support and encouragement and most of the suggestions were for furthering the project, adding in another type of media, for example, or suggesting plot twists to narratives.

Every day, the children and I spent some time after the workshop and even during workshop just chatting and getting to know each other. In part, I was trying to find out what makes them tick, what they are passionate about. I was also trying to make the space more comfortable. They were also just a fun and funny group who loved to give each other attitude.

I also made it a practice to be open with the children, despite the expected classroom environment. I wanted to encourage a space in which we could freely talk to each other and express ourselves. Jennifer, in particular, loved to test me, whether by deleting the boys' swiki pages or asking me to demonstrate various dance steps as if she'd never seen them when I mentioned liking a style of dance, then saying "That's right!" when I could. I called her on her testing, which made her laugh, as usual, but increased her respect. She smiled a little when I accused her of testing me and I could see that she approved of my being up front with her. I allowed the children to ask me anything, whether or not I had a boyfriend, what it's like to have Indian parents, etc. If I did not feel a question was appropriate, I drew lines using humor instead of formality. Again, this helped establish relationships and boundaries informally, although much of how these things affected the workshop I only see in retrospect.

As the workshop progressed and we ran into more difficulty, I realized that spending time just in conversation had been extremely helpful. The group did like me and because of that, they became invested in the workshop. We ran into more blocks along the way, and many were facilitated by the fact that the children liked and trusted me. They were willing to give me the benefit of the doubt when I struggled to convey my vision of the workshop to them and when I did not conform to their expectations of a teacher.

Mike was the student that I had the hardest time understanding and connecting to. Unlike Jennifer, he did not ask me what I wanted him to make. He just gave me blank looks whenever I spoke, only laughing if I teased him, teased someone else, or made fun of myself. Every time I said the word poetry, he laughed a little, then resumed his

blank look. I barely knew him and could not read him at all. The space between us was far from comfortable; it was practically non-existent.

I knew there was some poetry there, however. During the first session, I saw Mike writing something on his swiki page that rhymed and had attitude. He noticed me looking, as did his friends, and as soon as they leaned over to look, he deleted all of the text and saved the changes. Beneath the blank looks, I knew there was a lot there, but nothing had resonated between us yet. Unlike Jennifer, we did not chat easily after workshop. He only addressed me as part of group conversations. Trying to speak one-on-one resulted in answers to questions I had asked, but nothing more.

After showing him a series of sample full-contact poems and receiving no response, I left him to create a project. Mike drew multiple, complex drawings, imported images and strung them together with text. The text contained some fun internal rhymes and alliteration, but was basically a nonsensical narrative. He called it his poem, with a pause before the word poem that emphasized that he did not think of it as real poetry and was testing how I would react. I let it go. He played around with some of the sounds, made the system sound like scratching a record to a beat. I let him play with some of the sound elements, hoping he would add to his creation. He did not.

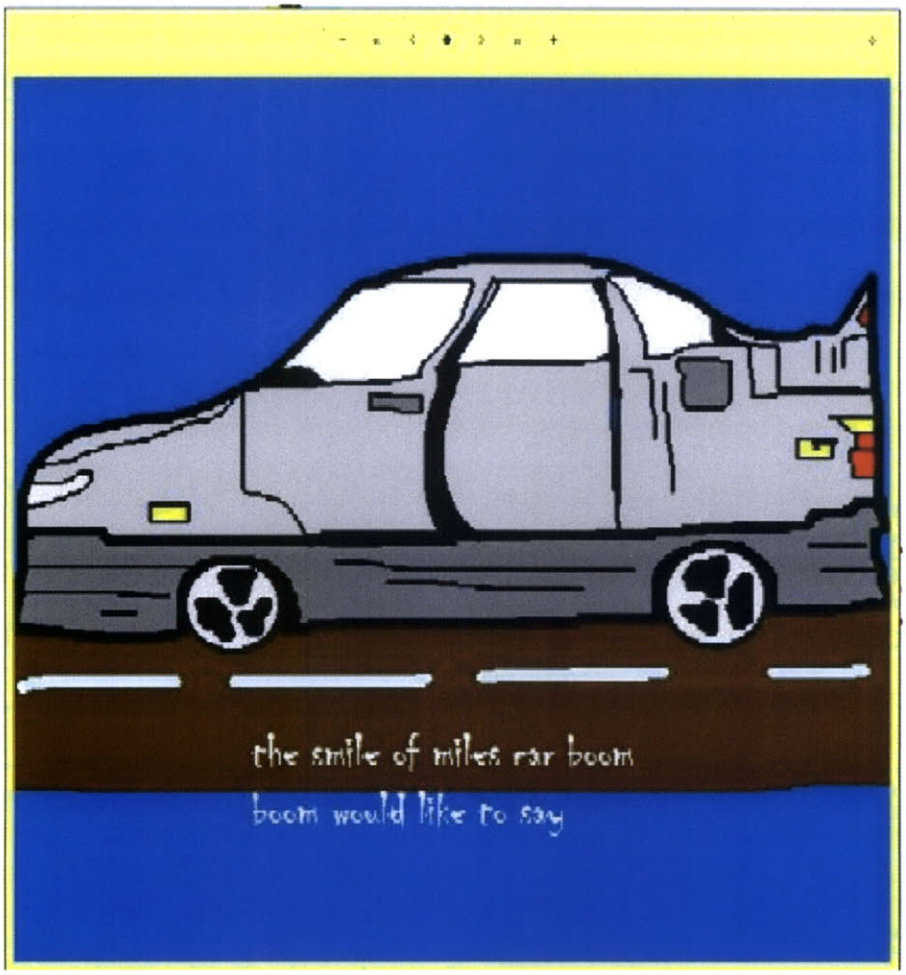


Figure 7: Scene from Mike's poem

On the day that I brought everyone outside and let them draw, we finally had our break through. He drew various objects—a turntable, a samurai and some graffiti. I knew that he was interested in samurais and anime. He used anime images in his projects and at one point was reading a book about samurai.

I asked Mike what he would like to do for a next project. He said he was thinking. This happened a couple of times during the conversation outside. The group would be talking and then his face would go completely blank. I commented on this at one point

and he said he's always like that—except I had seen him otherwise. His face is very engaged when discussing anime, samurais, teasing people and listening to music.

I asked him what he liked to do in his spare time. He responded, "Eat. Sleep. Listen to music." and after a pause "Ride my bike." About self-expression, he said that he doesn't do it. When I asked about fashion, the clothes he wears, he said "No. I wear all different clothes." He finally said he expresses himself by playing music loud, but he doesn't like to make music.

This conversation went on for a little bit and we were both frustrated. I felt parental, like the adult asking "How was school today?" with the child responding apathetically "Nothing." because I had asked the wrong question. It was uninspiring.

I backed off. The others were doing various things. I left Mike outside staring off into space and went inside to do my own things. About five or seven minutes later, he came inside and stood next to me. I asked him if I could help him. He said he'd been thinking. I asked, "About what?" He paused, then replied, "Food." I turned back to my work. He stayed. He was obviously trying very hard to reach out, but at the same time, just said something facetious at every turn. He was having trouble expressing himself to me in just a conversation. So I asked him what he thought he had been signing up for and he said he didn't know. I asked what he had hoped to get out of the workshop and he said he wanted to see something different. I asked if he had and he replied, "Yes." I asked him about the software environment and he said, "You can do anything, make anything, change anything." I asked him if there was anything he wanted to do or make or change and he paused then replied, "I don't know."

I felt this was a big turning point. For once, we were having a real conversation. I told him that even when he's being silly, he has a really good sense of rhyme and rhythm. Mike paused again and said "Thank you" as if it both surprised and touched him, as if no one had said something like that to him before. Then the conversation seemed to have ended, so I returned to my work. Mike turned on his CD player. His headphones were hanging around his neck and it was turned up loud enough so I could hear it. He opened up the disk man and every so often made it skip so it sounded like scratching. I asked him if he'd ever scratched records and he said he has two turntables at home. He would like better ones but they're expensive, but he likes doing it. I told him about the DJ Robot at the Media Lab in the Computing Culture group and he liked that.

Mike showed instead of telling his way of expression. Like Ron, it was not something he could admit straight out (like when he deleted the text he had written when his friends looked over) but he did reach out by scratching with his volume turned up.

He reached out as soon as I backed off.

The experience with Mike highlighted that sometimes the best way to pursue a relationship is to just let it be. I was so insistent about getting to know the children and understanding them, that at least with him, I did not leave the space and time for a response. Jennifer and I connected more immediately because she actively seeks personal relationships. She does not hesitate to approach people in the center, although she quite visibly shows whom she considers talking to and whom she considers to be full of nonsense through her facial expressions and the time and effort she spends on an individual. Mike was open with the people who were already his friends, but otherwise maintained a constant blank look. After we had our breakthrough, he was much more

animated with me. He started conversations, danced around the room and was generally quite silly and expressive. It was a completely different kind of relationship—one that I had initially feared was impossible.

6. construction, deconstruction, appropriation, reconstruction

In my initial design of the Full-Contact Poetry environment, I was highly interested in the dialectic between construction and deconstruction. I took the elements that I knew from my models of constructing and deconstructing, namely building and critiquing, and translated those ideas into software. I both hoped and assumed that having supported both ideas, they would flow naturally in the workshop space. The children's expressophobia stunned me, however, and eliminated any possibility at hosting group critiques. The deconstructive side of my environment, namely the online forum for sharing projects to critique and reconfigure, became irrelevant until the children's inhibitions could be addressed. I became so anxious about moving past this expressophobia that I lost sight of the idea of deconstruction as an act of working from examples, of taking apart, appropriating and responding. I focused solely on the children's construction and on trying to help them find projects.

The problem then became that the children could not construct in a vacuum without examples to work from, especially when faced with a new type of expression. Children, like all of us, work from the familiar, their own knowledge and experience, in order to deconstruct and reconstruct [16]. In education, one of the hardest decisions is what to give and what not to give. There is a paradox of wanting the child to make discoveries but also of providing the child with a starting point, a spark, and not forcing them to reinvent the wheel.

Initially, I did not provide the children with sufficient examples of what "Full-Contact Poetry" means. I wanted them to come up with the idea of full-contact poetry on their own, and then to create their own full-contact poems as artifacts of reflection and deconstruction. Of course the situation was made worse by the fact that they knew I had a mental model and a set of expectations, but they could not meet those expectations without sharing at least some of those models.

I quickly realized my mistake—that the paucity of artifacts and examples was frustrating both the children and myself. The children did not have poetic artifacts to tease apart and work from. As a group, we could not have a common language for discussing Full-Contact Poetry without a common set of artifacts and examples. How could we discuss expressive text as a vehicle for dynamic poetic expression without concrete examples in which this occurs? It would be like tying to discuss a sonnet without examples from Shakespeare or Petrarch—giving a form and expecting children to understand, appropriate and rise to it without context.

I showed the children a number of examples of full-contact poetry, both of my own creation in Squeak, and also by some designers using Flash and hypertext, which I found online. I chose a wide selection of poetry, some created for children, others more abstract interactions between image and text. This helped immensely in generating ideas for initial projects.

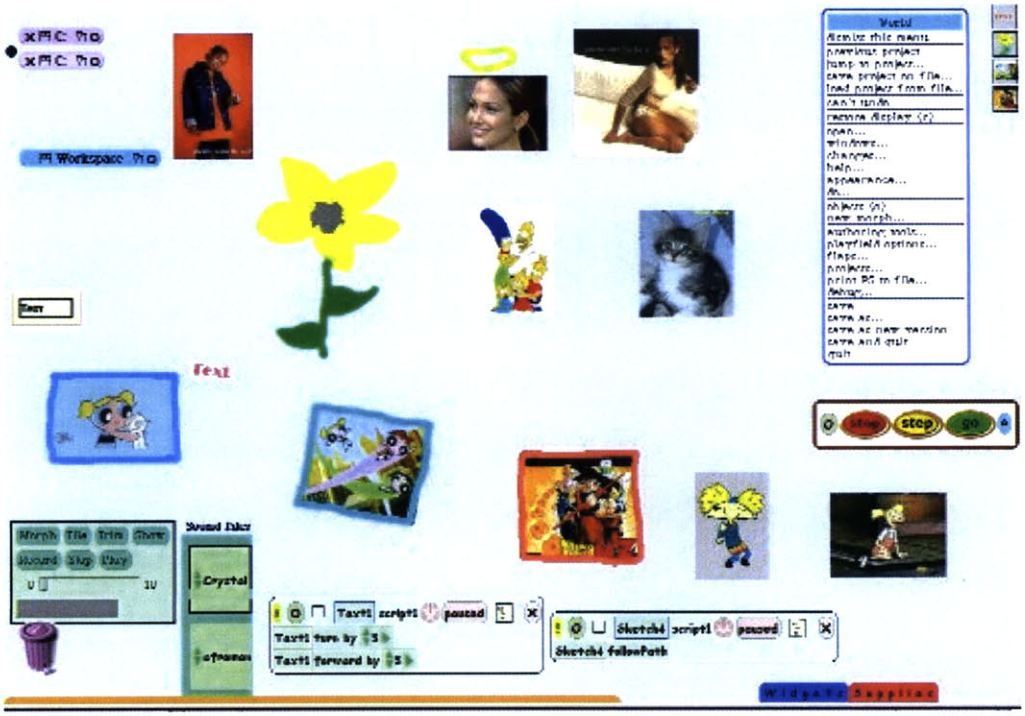
Upon more reflection, I realize that the children suffered from a lack of Squeak examples, as well. I wanted the children to create their own animations and scripts along with creating full-contact poetry. While we worked on animation techniques together and I circulated among the children giving technical help as they requested it,

they could probably have used many more Squeak examples to work from as well. Unfortunately, this is a larger problem within the Squeak community. There are a number of short tutorials online to introduce basic scripting techniques. The children quickly moved past that level, however, and needed a more complex set of examples. We managed because the group was small enough that I could individually help everyone as they requested it, but in a larger group, the scripting examples would be crucial.

On the first day of the workshop, Mike and Ron made animations based on characters from the Dragon Ball Z cartoon. They based their animations from recent episodes. At one point, they got into an argument over representation, Ron arguing that Mike's depiction did not match the Dragon Ball Z style. Mike defended himself by saying that the style was from a particular episode, which was drawn in a different style. The children even on the first day showed how they deconstruct, appropriate and reconfigure things that they care about. They also demonstrated that they are knowledgeable critics. Jennifer, in the meantime, turned the actor Vin Diesel into an angel with a purple halo. Her younger sister made similar modifications to Jennifer Lopez and the Powerpuff Girls.

Figure 8: Jennifer's reconfiguring of Vin Diesel, Mike's Dragon Ball Z animation and Teresa's collage of Jennifer Lopez and the Powerpuff Girls


Sketch3 script1 paused
Sketch3 hide
Sketch3 refresh
Sketch3 show


World
Text
Sketch4 script1 paused
Sketch4 followPath
step
go

The children did not have a model of full-contact poetry yet. Without examples of full-contact poems, they simply replicated what they knew how to do in an animation space, which was to animate cartoons.

After the first day of the workshop, the children floundered. They knew how to make a few things happen in the Squeak environment, but they did not know what to do with those skills. I took them through a series of examples, and they began their first projects. Jennifer interpreted a Shel Silverstein poem. Mike made his own poem. Beley animated the word "Hello" to greet the user festively, with bright colors and fonts swinging into place. After these initial projects, they stopped. Where else could they go?

What the children needed were examples at multiple levels. They saw a few examples made by designers of multimedia poetry, but the experience was still too foreign to them. The examples were not familiars [16] for them, pieces of their own lives that they could understand, appropriate and extend. They needed personal connections, something of their own that they could reconfigure or adapt to this new mode of expression.

I knew that the children needed some spark, like the spark Sylvia Plath provided for me, but the ideas were still too vague. I knew that I could not just translate or recreate my experiences artificially. It had to be from them, they needed to find a personal connection to what we were doing. Speaking with Mike crystallized my vague ideas and brought the issues of deconstruction and reconstruction to the forefront of my mind. Mike expresses himself through scratching records and graffiti. In both cases, he

creates through appropriating and reconstructing something already in existence, in one case working with music, in the other a space.

Instead of just providing examples, not all of which were relevant to the workshop or pieces that they could relate to, I could help them find starting points, their entry into the world of full-contact poetry. This was an interesting point because I intended full-contact poetry to serve as an entry into the world of poetry. During the workshop, I realized that expression was the aspect of poetry that was most compelling to me, and that instead of focusing on poetry itself, I would rather work with the children around poetic expression and experimenting with expression in different media. The idea of combining poetic expression with a dynamic, computational environment was too foreign to begin with.

The Dragon Ball Z animations from the first day were not what I had imagined full-contact poetry to be, yet the boys were building from their experience, using characters that they cared about and exchanging opinions. Instead of my trying to force a resonance with full-contact poetry, which is close to impossible, they used music, figures, characters that they already cared about to express themselves and develop that resonance. Henry Jenkins speaks of children as active consumers of media instead of passive observers. They take characters, make up their own stories, and in doing so, make the characters their own. The figures from media become a part of how they understand themselves [24].

With all of these remembered ideas about deconstruction and reconstruction, I worked to redesign the workshop. I understood that I had left the children in too big of a vacuum. While I had given examples, they still did not have the concrete pieces they needed to create projects. I still had not tapped into the things that made them tick.

I decided to try some warm-up exercises to see how they would work. I wanted exercises that would take some pressure off of them, loosen them up, but allow them to be creative and spontaneous. Many poetry workshops use exercises [16, 28, 29, 49], as do programming or robotics workshops in the form of challenges, but I needed something to bridge the gap between poetry and technology.

My first attempted exercise of asking the children to create something for a person they care about did not work. It was still much too undefined for them to feel comfortable. I had hoped that making an artifact for another person would alleviate some of the personal insecurity or fear of self-expression, but there was still too much pressure put on them to come up with an idea. The burden of coming up with an individual project weighed too heavily on them.

I switched to a well-defined exercise. I asked the children to free write for three minutes. I assured them that no one would read their exercises, including myself, unless they permitted it. They could write anything, nonsense, list things they like, dislike, how their day went, anything whatsoever. After three minutes, I asked them to underline a sentence that sounded interesting—not because of the meaning, but for the *sound* of the words. Then I asked them to draw and animate—without using words—the way the sentence sounds. If a word sounded hard, I asked the to draw and animate a hard looking object. A squishy sound could look squishy and quiver, for example.

The activity got them going immediately, although everyone was literal about the projects instead of abstract as I had asked. After a quick re-underlining of sentences, Jennifer drew the sentence "Hi, Mike!" with a hand waving at a picture she drew of Mike.

Mike picked the sentence “Happy happy joy joy!” and drew a field of smiley face flowers with bees spinning in circles around them. Shawna selected a sentence about all of the sports she liked and drew a girl standing next to a table of different types of objects, then had the girl juggle the objects.

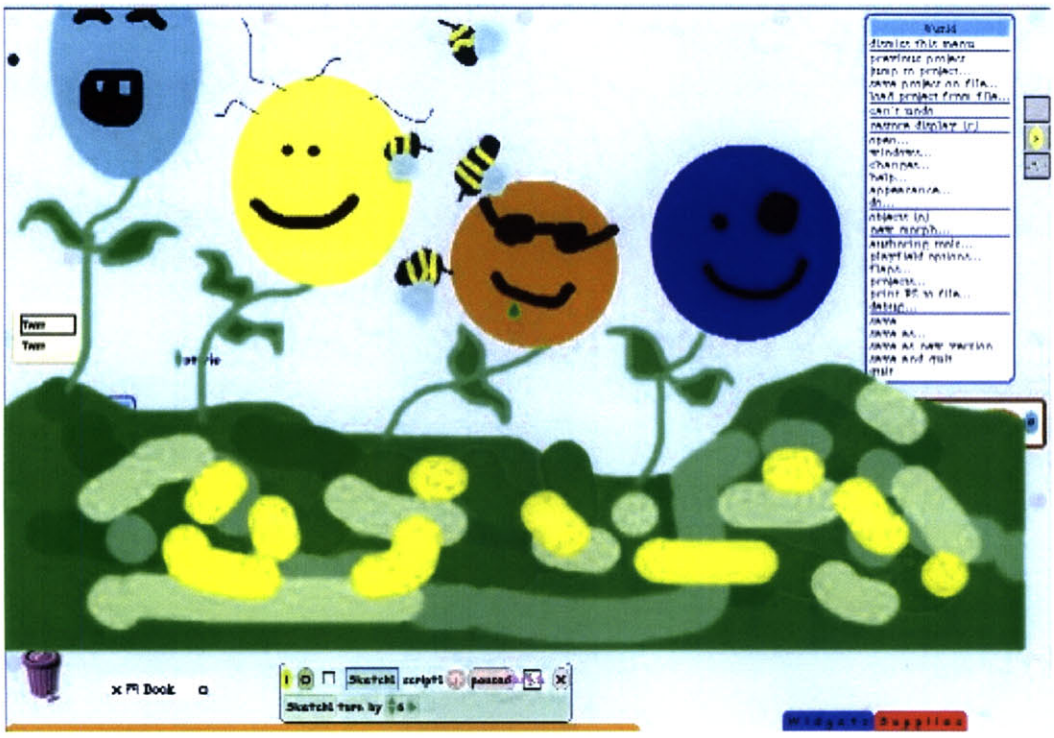
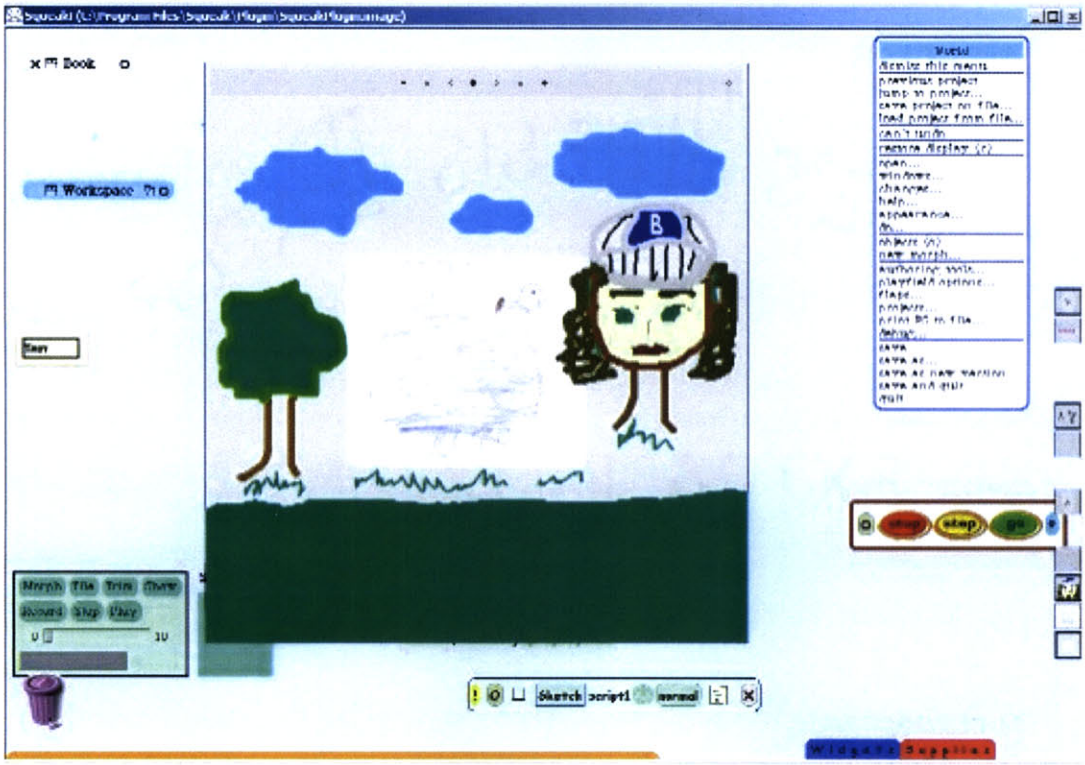


Figure 9: Mike’s flowers and bees, Shawna juggling, Jennifer’s image of Mike transplanted into a new project



Since the opening exercise method seemed to work, I designed another project with Mike in mind. I asked the group to import midi files of any song that they liked, and then to change the song by deleting tracks, changing instrumentation and even the sounds of instruments. Once they created a version of the song that they liked, they would create an animation to accompany the song, or part of the song.

This exercise liberated Jennifer. I had two objectives in mind with the exercise: to provide a more open exercise that could still generate projects and to create an exercise that would foster a longer-term project. Most of the children were creating single, daylong projects. Shawna started new projects every session and never finished any. Jennifer would work on non-workshop days to finish graphics then do animations with me present. Mike wrote his poem in a single day, and added sound on another

occasion. For the most part, though, the projects were simple enough to finish in one day and they took extra time for lack of other ideas.

The music exercise took days and the children were invested in it. A full day would be devoted to finding a song and making it just right. For the most part, midi recordings of popular songs are quite tacky, and the children hated hearing their favorite songs warped in such a way. They took a lot of effort to play with the songs, making them quite different from the original. Shawna, for example, made a funk version of Aaliyah's song "Are You That Somebody?"

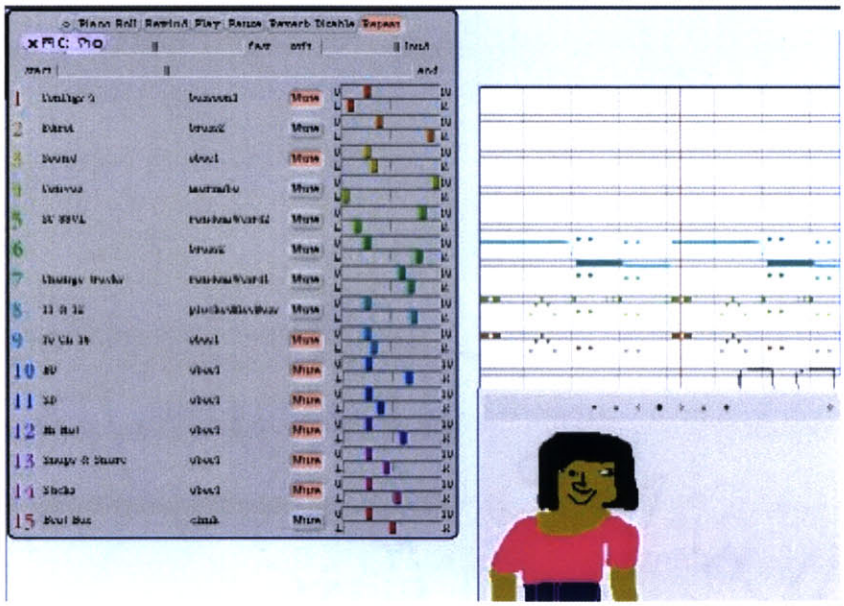


Figure 10: "Are You That Somebody?"

By the end of the workshop, I started to find a workshop voice and a rhythm that worked both for me and for the children. The exercises, when successful, took pressure off all of us. The children had something concrete to work from, but at the same time, they had freedom to express within the exercise. If they enjoyed the exercise, they could continue to build from that, otherwise they were free to work on other projects.

The workshop still suffered from a bit of a split personality because of the newness of the tool. The children, while trying to express with the Full-Contact Poetry environment were also just learning the environment. They could not express everything they wanted to because they did not have the technical expertise yet, but much of this was a function of time. With more time, the children would probably have become more fluent both in the technology and their expression.

I had not realized how difficult and complex the workshop would be with so many factors at play. Even thinking of a series of generative exercises became a challenge. I had read about numerous poetry workshops, particularly Kenneth Koch's successful work with elementary school children. During my workshop experience, I happened to buy Koch's first book about working with children and realized the process was not at all easy [30]. The process I was undergoing was quite normal, in fact.

The book I had read initially was the culmination of years of work. Koch had developed over the years, a series of exercises that resonated with many elementary school children. Early in his career, however, he had numerous hit and miss exercises before reaching an understanding of what made good generative poetry exercises for children. I realized that I needed to undertake a similar process of experimentation. The short, six-week workshop provided many different types of insight, but not nearly enough time to truly understand how to create a poetry and technology workshop.

7. finding voice

In the essay *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf describes the plight of women writers. She attributed the lack of contemporary women writers to the fact that writers require their own space and time to write. What women lacked were rooms of their own [56].

In Woolf's description, the essential aspects for writers to find and develop their voices are private spaces and time. Her description could also be applied to the Full-Contact Poetry Workshop. The six-week workshop that I ran in many ways was a rough draft. It was the first workshop that I facilitated alone, and the first workshop in which I tried to combine poetry and programming. I needed time to discover my workshop voice, to understand the group with whom I was working and make adjustments according to the group, their interests and their styles. But beyond my own need for time in order to find my workshop voice, time played an extremely limiting factor to what we could accomplish.

Our workshop lasted for six weeks. We met twice a week from three until five p.m. We had a total of twenty-four hours together in which to try to accomplish something meaningful. With the number of unknowns in the workshop, the amount we did accomplish is rather amazing. We needed time to get to know each other and create a safe environment for expression. We needed to encounter and understand each other's models of the workshop and of full-contact poetry. The children also needed time to learn the tool then use it in their poetic expressions.

There was a conflict between the purpose of the tool I provided and the workshop environment. Children are supposed to take their time to explore poetry and expression in their creation of full-contact poems. However, the workshop encouraged rushing, trying to do as much as possible in the limited time. It did not allow deep exploration, and instead caused anxiety.

Writing workshops and art schools, as I mentioned before, allow years for students to find and develop their voices. In the writing workshops in which I have participated, the first two months of the semester consisted of students situating themselves, becoming comfortable in the workshop and with their writing. Even the advanced writing classes showed radical shifts in students' voices as they experimented and found new styles that worked for them.

Again, while the aim of my workshop with children was not to create a group of full-contact poets, six weeks did not allow enough time to pursue the deep ideas of poetry and technology, or their intersection. We spent most of our time situating ourselves in a developmental process that was necessary for every member of the workshop. I needed time to discover the children's interests and in turn, to try to connect to them through those interests. They needed time to get to know me and my motivations, and then to decide if they wanted to be a part of what I was doing.

The breakup of the workshop into small two-hour pieces, twice a week, while necessary because the children were in school, also made it difficult to create an immersive poetic culture. Instead of a workshop, the full-contact poetry culture could probably have flourished under a less rigid structure, in which the activities were a part of the day,

occurring spontaneously in the center. Children who wanted to learn Squeak or construct full-contact poems could do so informally, in the way that children at the center spontaneously decide to play a game, read a book or shoot a movie.

In his dissertation, Aaron Falbel describes a school with a similar structure. In the *Friskol*, children self-organized their activities and were provided with materials and teachers who served as support. Sometimes, when a group of children wanted to learn a common task, they would ask a teacher to instruct on a particular topic, otherwise learning happened organically, with a girl teaching a younger girl to read when she asked or another group deciding to study astronomy intensively for a few weeks [21].

In *Mindstorms*, Papert describes math culture as a space in which people practice math. The math is not the denatured math of school and classes, but a practical part of life, a way of looking at and making sense of the world [36]. The children needed to be able to work with practitioners of poetry, for whom expression serves as a way of life—seeing it as integrated into a part of life instead of a separate event that happens twice a week for two hours.

Creating a poetic culture involves working with poets in an open space receptive to expression. Among my realizations about creating an effective workshop space for expression and technology was the appreciation of the role of space. In addition to creating a trusting environment in which children can express themselves without fear of ridicule, the actual physical space is important.

The computer center in which we worked is well designed for its regular use. The computers are in rows and visitors are meant to work individually and quietly. There are

a number of computer classes held at the center, and the front of the room has space for people to sit around and talk or build robots. After running the workshop for a few weeks, however, I realized that I had a very different idea of a full-contact poetry space, and part of this came from the children's expressophobia.

In the Reggio Emilia pre-primary schools, the spaces are carefully configured to allow for both public and private spaces. Children can work in a large *atelier*, in smaller spaces for clusters of three or four, or in individual spaces. The rooms have a variety of open spaces and nooks designed to give children freedom of movement and privacy. In the schools, they also mix media within spaces, so that a computer sits next to craft materials. This helps children see each of the materials as just another tool and by proximity, all of the tools can be used on the same projects. In this way, barriers become fluid, just through the physical environment [45].

The idea of public and private space resonated with my workshop experience. How would the workshop have been different if, instead of working in the open all of the time, the children could have had privacy to work on their poetry or expressions until they were ready to share their work? Personally, I prefer to write in seclusion, both for concentration and comfort. I do not like having people look over my shoulder. It makes me feel self-conscious, no matter what I am writing. The children were in an even more complex situation. They were using an unfamiliar tool to create expressive forms, which were new to them, in a space in which they were surrounded by their peers.

In all of my visions of a Full-Contact Poetry environment, I envisioned a liberating, expressive space, but running a thesis workshop has inherent conflicts to the space I imagined. First, the children were bound to express themselves with a single tool. The

idea of full-contact poetry came from my desire to give children an entry into poetry and poetic expression, to give them a play space. In the workshop, we used my environment. The Full-Contact Poetry environment worked for the purposes of the workshop. The children were able to make their poetic expressions, write animations and extend the system with my help when necessary. However, it is still only one tool. In another setting, if more time were available, I would have loved to offer multiple tools for multiple voices. Artists choose their media and their tools. Similarly, I would have liked to offer choices to the children, beyond using multiple media within one environment. Some children probably prefer digital video and others like other programming languages.

I would also have liked to extend the Full-Contact Poetry environment to take on some of the performance aspects so vital to slam poetry. Currently the entire environment is onscreen. A future implementation would include tools for children to work in an interactive performance space, as well as onscreen.

The Full-Contact Poetry Workshop was necessary to test the software environment and to challenge the models the children and I had regarding workshops, poetry and technology. While we did not fully meet my expectations of full-contact poetry, the children were exposed to new ideas of expression and how the computer can be used as an expressive tool, beyond just using it to consume entertainment. Their expressions also challenged my impressions of full-contact poetry. Do Mike and Ron's Dragon Ball Z animations qualify?

Part of my learning experience was not to worry about every issue at once—to focus on one or two which were pressing, and let everything settle around those. Most of my

energy was devoted to getting to know the children, to finding out what they care about and how they can express it.

I found some answers to the paradox of rigidity in the workshop space versus working in a vacuum, and the dangers of either extreme, through the exercises I went through with the children. I realized the importance of both poetic and technical examples as objects for deconstruction, beyond the children's own work. By the end of the workshop, I began to find my voice as a facilitator, although like Koch, I will probably need many years to exercise and refine that voice.

The project began with a desire to open up poetry to many other voices, and also to broaden the palette of constructionist tools beyond math and science. Over the course of the workshop, I struggled to balance those other voices with my own. I had a project, a vision, a purpose that I wanted to share—without megalomaniacally forcing it on others. I had an experience with poetry that I felt others should also experience and wanted to find entry points for others into this world.

But the real purpose of the workshop, which I did not realize explicitly until later reflection, was to liberate children's voices at multiple levels. Children should not be bound by my tool and my model of expression, but should have multiple tools, multiple voices, multiple examples and multiple people encouraging their exploration of expression. They should have the opportunity to use as much time as they need to experiment with many types of expression, and the space in which they work should support that exploration. In other words, in order to find their voices, children need rooms of their own. Beyond just having rooms, however, children need active support for their hundred voices in their hundred languages.

8. appendix

Week	First workshop day	Second workshop day
1	Introduction to Squeak, Dragon Ball Z animations	
2		
3	Many FCP examples work on first projects	
4	Non-computer day Breakthrough with Mike	First successful exercise
5	Midi exercise	Jennifer's Survivor project
6		

May 20, 2002

Day 1

Today was the first day of the workshop. The kids definitely get full-contact. I'm not so sure about poetry, though. I think I'm having the same problem as Roger. . . I went in thinking "This is what I would like to do" and the kids of course have their own ideas about it.

There were 6 today, five teens and 1 grown-up. This may change because there were 6 kids signed up and 2 possible grown-ups, but of the 6 kids, 4 showed and then we picked up one other random one. I told them that others are welcome to join on Friday. . . I don't know what to expect-- if everyone will stay with it, if there'll be some movement. One kid showed up at 5, having confused the times, so he may be in the Friday session. Apparently the kids hang out there most afternoons, play with computers, do random things. There being the South End Technology Center @ Tent City, run by Mel King.

We went much farther than I'd expected which was cool. I didn't know what level programmers, computer users, I'd get. They just picked up fast and were quite willing to

play around in the environment. But as I mentioned earlier, things didn't go quite as planned. I had advertised that the kids should bring a favorite song to the first session, but only one did, so that kind of killed my idea for how to start. Here's what I had thought out:

Chat a bit. . . introductions, etc. Talk about "full-contact poetry" and how the workshop is designed (kind of a ground rules-- the usual, we'll make stuff, critique each other, it's not a class, interrupt me, ask questions, you'll design what you want to do, I'm not going to tell you what to do, etc.). Play some music, talk about it, then show a sample full-contact poem and get into some text animation based on their favorite songs.

Here's what happened: we did introductions, I talked a little about full-contact poetry, then brought up music, and only one person had stuff. We listened to little bits of two songs, I attempted to start a conversation about poetry and music which fell pretty flat, so I jumped ahead to other stuff. Quickly pointed out the swiki, that it exists, some of the documentation, told them they could add whatever they want to it, and then got into Squeak.

Now I *finally* figured out the timing yesterday and ended up modifying my environment quite a bit, so it was closer to what I wanted (i.e. proposed in the thesis proposal. . . there are still other pieces that I'd like to add in but more on that later). Between changing things and documenting, I didn't get to play with it enough. I discovered at 10 am today that something big was broken. The projects for some reason can no longer be written out into small project files, or when that works, trying to load them back in crashes the Squeak virtual machine. Yes, big problem because I wanted the kids to share and discuss their projects on the swiki. They can save their work within the environment instead of as a separate file, but this means they can no longer upload their

work to the server because the environment is so large and unwieldy. So after some panic and frantic debugging, I discovered that no, in fact this won't work in time for the workshop this afternoon, so I told the kids what the bugs are and said I'd fix them as soon as I can. That's the plan for Thursday so that I can run by the center and update the files there. But it was exciting to see kids using parts of the environment that I'd built or debugged! One of my frustrations in creating the environment is that it's hard to see the changes I made in the Squeak source code. Some of the tiles are visible, different things that kids can do, but some of it is hidden away, but what they were doing today included some stuff I only figured out yesterday! I was very excited.

To get into the animation, I went through a few basic objects, starting with text. Showed how to change attributes like color, font, size, and then we got into moving it around in a circle. I encouraged them to play while I was showing them stuff, so throughout the session there were many panicked "I broke it!"s which turned out to be not so bad. I showed them how to import pictures, draw new pictures within the system and record sounds. We did some basic motion animation with the pictures they drew. Then, since we were using various types of objects, they downloaded and imported various images (two of the boys chose Dragon Ball Z characters, one of the girls chose some star she has a crush on, another girl picked a random guy walking down the street, as examples) and then they drew additions to the pictures, then made something happen between the drawing and the image. For example, a Dragon Ball Z character zapped a smiley face.

The programming wasn't too difficult today, but they were excited to be able to do stuff immediately. I was trying not to just tell them how to do everything, but to take them through various menus, talk out their programs with them and let them figure out the commands and their order. It was tough to figure out which things to tell when. . . I think I

told a little too much today, but it was to get everyone started and into the environment. Towards the end they were experimenting and getting things going on their own

The boys doing the Dragon Ball Z animations were basing them off of recent episodes, which I thought was interesting. They were arguing over representation "No, it's supposed to be this way!" "I'm using a style which shows up in this episode!" "I saw that episode, it wasn't pink like that, it was--" Again, it isn't text, it isn't poetry, but at least it's stuff that they care about and have an opinion on, so they're discussing their animation. Ooh, dangling prepositions. I'm tired.

With 15 minutes left, we went back to the swiki. I showed them how to add in pages, edit text. Of course the first thing that happened was a war between two of the guys and one of the girls with renaming each other's pages, changing text, etc. etc. which was fun and silly.

I think by the end of it. . . well, it went well, although I felt a little too constructionist by the end of it since the kids weren't working on poetry/writing, and I gave the kids some homework. To bring a narrative, text or lyrics of some sort to the next session so that we can get into some more complex animations. Okay, so it's very open-ended instructionism. If they come in with a script for anime characters to duke it out, we'll do it. If they come in with love songs, that's fine, too. As long as there's some self expression going on. . .

Note to self: reread Henry Jenkins.

Character sketches to follow on workshop participants. . .

(myself, Beley, Ron, Mike, Amanuel, Jennifer, Angel)

Anything else? I was also planning on taking a digital camera in on Friday to encourage kids to take photos, get personal. Maybe do something small and informal on the swiki to introduce themselves.

Mike started to write something more on his page (rather than hello, or waz up) which he deleted as he got embarrassed. It rhymed and had attitude (actually, even some really cool internal rhymes). . . but as soon as he caught me looking and his friends leaned over to look he erased it. . . okay, so there is some poetry. Maybe I'll start it off myself. . . looks like everyone wrote stuff, silly stuff, then deleted it when it was time to go. . . hmm.

12 sessions seems extremely short and extremely long at the same time. I don't know how teachers manage to have curricula. . . it's so hard to plan activities one day to the next, no idea what we'll cover, what they'll be interested in! Although teaching classical Indian dance in some ways is easier. . . there's an order to the steps that must be completed before starting items. You go as far as you can with individual students each class, whether doing steps or items. There's some structure to follow, although speed varies. But there really isn't the choice to learn one step before another. . . it's predetermined. This doesn't have the structure-- a few things obviously come first, such as navigating Squeak, recognizing that *everything* is an object. . . but what people want to program varies so much. It's very hard to predict.

Another realization-- I need to be working along with them. . . making my own projects, going deeper. . . trying lots of different things. Every user wants to do all sorts of different things, some of which I know, some of which I've built, some of which are there but I don't know and some of which are yet to be developed. Today was fine, I could answer every question, and I'm a good debugger (much better at understanding what went wrong than writing code from scratch, or so I discovered!). . . but they'll go quickly.

I'm much more likely to adapt to a system and its limitations for my own use, but for someone else's use, my first instinct is to adapt the system and not the person. Hmm. . .

May 22, 2002

A few more details to add in and thoughts from conversation. . .

Hannes and I talked yesterday about popularity in the classroom-- being liked by students (or workshop participants) and how to negotiate authority and likeability. Along with negotiating expectations. I mentioned that when I first started, I asked everyone to pull their chairs into a circle to talk, instead of everyone sitting in a row of computers. That request elicited a bit of confusion. Jennifer, whenever she called me for help, called me "Miss" which completely confused me! And she kept asking me "Okay, what do you want me to do now?" which I'd counter with "What do you want to do? What do you want to make happen?" which again, elicited some confusion.

Regarding "popularity"-- I think I started off a bit too formally at the beginning because 1) I automatically played teacher, 2) I wanted to establish some sort of authority, especially because I look like I'm about the same age as the participants and 3) I didn't know what note to strike so went into default formal mode. As we got into the environment and the kids started working on things that interest them, they started to tease each other, and I also just joined in, making sure everyone got an equal dose of teasing and defense. That helped break down a lot of barriers, so they would actually interrupt and ask questions or try things out without my demonstrating some command first. It also made requests like "Please don't erase each other's swiki pages" go over better. Requested formally, it was basically ignored. Reinforced with a little bit of teasing, they went with it.

One of the big concerns is of course how to get the poetry in without imposing it. I think I was too open the first day (of course it was just day one and it takes a few sessions to figure out what's going on) but I was worried about being too specific-- giving very concrete examples of full-contact poems which would then be replicated. But then without full-contact poems, they started to replicate what they know to do in an animation space, which is to animate cartoons. I think one way around that is to focus more specifically on text animation and text-specific tools. David also suggested genre as a way to deal with the open vs. narrow problem, so anime is a genre of animation, within it there are different styles (as Mike and Ron were arguing), but then music videos are a genre, hip-hop is a genre, slam poetry is a genre. . . the problem is doing something new with a frame of reference that isn't too constrictive and yet letting them see what the new thing is. . . right now they know what poetry is, they know what computers are, but have no idea what a junction could look like. . . maybe a couple of new media poetry web sites as a genre? Hannes suggested music videos that somehow use text if I could think of any. . . all I could think of is Everybody Hurts by R.E.M. It's an interesting video.

David talked about all of these things in terms of anchoring. There are so many variables: new space, new group, new idea, new programming environment-- focusing on anchoring one or two things and letting the others fall into place around them, like in complex AI systems. So the popularity issue becomes one of "social anchoring" and "developing a more organic control" which is aided by the fact that the kids are volunteering to do the workshop, they weren't forced to be there like in a high school English class. Anchoring the full-contact poetry idea through examples from multiple genres. There's the idea of deconstruction in working from examples, taking them apart, understanding them, and then making your own version (like code). Margarita suggested

giving kids something that's half made, so they have some sort of framework, but then can do whatever they want.

I guess with every poetry workshop, there are various examples to work from. . . different poems have different features. . . so what's a subset for full-contact poems?

Tuesday May 28th

Day 2 (May 24th) review

The second day was pretty frustrating. Once again, I had a plan for what we'd do. . . some examples prepared to continue and build off of the previous week. This time the problem was that I had mostly a new group. Jennifer returned, but Mike was in New Hampshire and Ron had homework. . . one of the girls from Monday was someone no one had seen before and we're not sure if she knew it's a biweekly activity (I hadn't realized she was new to the center since Beley had invited her to join) and I have no idea what happened with Amanuel. Jennifer brought Lisa, Jose and her little sister Teresa, who wasn't supposed to participate, but did.

I got to know a little bit more about the kids, but I had a very hard time balancing between working with the new kids and trying to take things further with Jennifer. I think I tried to do too much at once, so it wasn't that interesting. Jose thought he was coming to a games design session which was a slight problem. I optimized Squeak for poetry, not games design. . . another version of Squeak would have better suited what he wanted to do, and he was having trouble understanding how the code worked. I gave a few examples, thought he could jump off from there, but he wanted more direction, more of my telling him what to do and how to do it. Lisa was going slowly, but she was interested in all of the little things which could happen in the environment. My mistake there was

that she looks much older than she is. She's 12 and looks at least 15, so I think I made a couple of assumptions and tried to go more quickly. Teresa is 10 and she just jumped into things immediately. She seemed to find the environment very intuitive (why?) and jumped in. . . it could be that unlike Jose, she hasn't had experience with many environments, I think Jose has played with the games design software Mel's kids use and was expecting a similar interface. Teresa recorded a bunch of things, herself rapping, part of a rap song, and played around with images and drawings. If she returns, it should be easy to take her into a next step of making a sequence out of those. I think "making a sequence" might be a better way of speaking about what we're doing. I'm jumping too much and being too vague in what I'm asking-- story, narrative, poem-- it's all too broad. But we started with simple animations-- one thing happening to another thing, but making a sequence of events that can be strung together. . . might make more inductive sense. Teresa picked things up faster than any of the kids I've had in workshop thus far, and she was making things happen on her own, without my initiating. The previous session, the kids had made a some things happen without me, they experimented a little, but I don't know if they were waiting for me to tell them what to do more than Teresa or what exactly happened. She got into the sound on her own, without my telling here there were sound capabilities, whereas the previous session, the boys would experiment with things I had pointed out already, or would ask if other things were possible, which I would then show.

Jennifer wanted to do some text animation similar to what I showed on the first day (yay!) but unfortunately I was so wrapped up with the newbies that I had trouble spending the needed time with her. I don't know if having another person there would have helped. She got a couple of things going, but needed more support. As with any

group, the people who are vocal and clamor for attention get it more than those who don't, and the new ones clamored much more.

I chatted a bit with the girls afterwards. Jennifer and Teresa are half sisters, Jennifer is 16 and Teresa, as I mentioned, is 10. She just turned 10 actually. Jennifer gets very upset with Teresa for wanting to do everything that she does, and when I said "Well, she just wants to be like you," Jennifer responded with "Well she can't be. She has to be her own person!" I think going with the authority issues I discussed in earlier entries, I want the kids to be younger, or myself to be older. . . it's also easier for me to work with the girls than the boys, there's a more natural rapport with them, which I need to fix. And it was also easier for me to work with Teresa, the youngest one. I'm used to working with either young kids or adults, so high school is a bit tricky for me. I worry about what material is "appropriate" even though normally when I interact with teens, that doesn't come up. . . I can chat with them as equals, not worrying about what I'm saying. . . and with younger kids also, it isn't a problem, but in this different context, this "school"ish context even though we're trying not to make it that. . . there are assumptions, or assumptions of responsibilities.

So I was surprised when Jennifer started asking questions about where I live, who I live with "your boyfriend? No? Why not? Are you married yet? Why not? I thought you're 23." and Jennifer telling Teresa "My dad's the only guy our mom married" and Teresa getting upset "She married my dad!" "No she didn't." and after seeing that Teresa was getting really upset "Nevermind." Lisa followed, I could see that she understood what Jennifer was talking about, and Teresa was a little confused, but she understood some of it and what she did understand was upsetting. I wouldn't have started a conversation like that and was initially a little surprised, but then thinking back at high school, of course that isn't surprising at all. Of course Lisa knew what was going on as a twelve year old. I felt

pretty silly when I caught myself falling into these stereotypes of what kids "should" and "shouldn't" know, which I'm sure wouldn't have come up at all in a "normal" encounter, as opposed to a workshop space where I keep tricking myself into thinking I'm supposed to play the responsible adult. At least Jennifer stopped calling me "Miss!"

Now this is an interesting point-- what are the differences between conversations and workshops which make distinctions like this happen? Is it because I have to consciously stop myself from playing teacher in a classroom but some things are less obvious than others? The expectation in the workshop from the kids' end was that I would teach. How can I fulfill what they expect without actually being like a teacher? What are the good things in instructionist teaching vs. the bad things that we can all easily enumerate? How can I balance things like asking kids to make what they're interested in with the fact that I want them to build certain types of things (full-contact poems rather than games). In some ways, what I'd like to do would be much easier in a classroom. Yet, the results might end up being forced and trivial. In a conversational setting, Jennifer would never have called me "Miss" but in the workshop, she did. Jennifer has little tests for me, see if I know things, if I claim things I don't actually know-- little things, of course, like playing tricks on the guys and seeing first if I notice and second how I handle it, asking me to demonstrate various dance steps, etc. (we were talking about dance, I mentioned something about liking salsa, she asked me how to salsa, I showed her the basic step, she said "That's right" at which point I realized she was asking something she knew, I asked if she knew how to salsa, she said "I'm Puerto Rican" which I hadn't known, and I asked her straight out if she was testing me and she said "Of course."). I'm sure in a conversation, the testing wouldn't have happened either, at least not in the same way. I wouldn't hesitate in a conversation about what can be said and what cannot be said-- what websites are appropriate or inappropriate-- what poems can be posted. In the

workshop, I'm playing safe, sterile, probably because I'm not that comfortable, there are things I want to accomplish and I worry about how to get there. In a conversation, there are no predefined goals like that, so after the workshop, I can quit the teacher game and chat with the girls, compare dance steps, talk about whether or not Vin Diesel is hot (Jennifer says he is, I say he isn't my type, she says he's definitely her type), etc.

I guess we're all still trying to figure each other out, and what we're doing. They're uncertain of the workshop, what the point is, and I'm uncertain about how to present it. Back to anchoring. I need something simple, and I think a few different plans for the next session, so if it's a new group, a mixed group, or a returning group, I have ideas for general things to do. For returning people, looking at a few examples and making sequences. For new people, we can start differently or the same way, depending on their interest. . . maybe split them up, so returners are working in a group near each other and new people are primarily with me and I'm not running all over the place and then let everyone mix together once we've had a little introduction.

May 29 2002

Rereading Kenneth Koch for poetry workshop with kids pointers. The important points:

-reading and writing as one subject (animation and poetry as one subject equivalent-- things are still very split)
-dealing with serious issues, for example, children's poetry books are quite trivial (also dick and jane readers mentioned in sylvia ashton-warner's teacher)-- who cares about things that are safe and banal? kick things up a little
-having a set of samples that can be "copied"
-connections to the here and now

June 3 2002

Day 3

Well, I didn't report back from Friday because I didn't have anyone that day. Mike and Jennifer were both sick and they're the ones who recruit others, so I took screen shots of what the kids have done thus far. I'll shrink and post them soon. I wasn't really expecting anyone because it was a beautiful Friday afternoon. . . and talking to Beley, who runs the games design workshops on Saturday mornings, having no one show isn't uncommon. Mel and I chatted a bit, which was good. As David suggested, I asked him about appropriateness, what kinds of subject matter and language is acceptable in his center. He said that they don't encourage swearing, and in terms of subject matter, as long as it isn't putting people down, it's okay. I feel much better now :)

Today I had Jennifer, Mike and Beley, which was a good, small, very manageable group. All three have come to at least one other workshop day, so they understand the basics of navigating the Squeak environment. Beley and Jennifer both have played with it on their own time, as well, which is great.

I started out today by taking them through some examples of hypermedia/ animated poetry that I found online, mostly built in Flash, some HTML, just to get them to start thinking about poetry and media. I showed them some abstract examples of text and image, others with images that narrate the text, etc. just to get expose them to different ideas, different representations. Jennifer and Beley were pretty surprised and into some of them. Mike is much harder for me to read-- I wasn't sure if he got what I was trying to say.

I soon discovered that he did, and the first thing he did was test me, in a Jennifer sort of a way. Every time I say the word poetry, he kind of laughs, and he tested to see what I would accept as a poem. He made a lot of very involved drawings (pretty impressive ones) and wrote some text to loosely string them together. No animation yet since the drawings were so complex and time-consuming, but he listed a few things he'd like to do. The drawings were pretty silly, and he pulled in some pictures he grabbed online. . . the text has some rhyme, alliteration, but it's also quite silly. Of course I let his poem go and he's going to keep working on it. . . maybe add in some sound, definitely some animation.

Jennifer, the one who always asks what I want her to do, needed a starting point, so I gave her a stack of poems and a book by Shel Silverstein. She picked up on one of the slam poems and started work on that, but gave up on it and picked a short Shel Silverstein poem instead. Unlike Mike, Jennifer has no faith in her computer drawing skills. She only imports pictures she finds online. She was having trouble finding the images she wanted, since a few were rather abstract, and was frustrated. . . this is why she switched poems. She really enjoys drawing, though, so I suggested she bring in some drawings that we can scan and pull into her poems. Her code is getting pretty complex. . . if then statements, calling scripts from within a script. . . I helped her out a bit, but we talked through every step, and anything that we did once, the next time she did on her own, or talked through with me as she did the steps, testing the logic.

Beley focused on text animation today instead of wanting to make a game (I think the examples really helped him see other ways an animation environment can be used), picking fonts and bright colors to the letters of Hello and making them dance into place. It's also quite nice.

All in all, I'm pretty impressed with Day 3. We changed the workshop from Friday to Wednesday (I think it's really difficult for people to come in on a Friday afternoon when school's out for the weekend and the weather's becoming so beautiful). For Wednesday, I'd like to push what they're working on deeper, farther, and get into some critique. Let Jennifer and Beley look at Mike's poem and debate whether it "qualifies" as a poem. Jennifer, looking through some of the Shel Silverstein, asked "Is this really a poem? It's so short-- only two lines!" She was quite skeptical. I asked her about haikus which are three lines and she conceded that they exist but that they're different. . . and I'd really like to have all of them play with sound a bit. Mike has a good head for rhyme (even his silly ones) and alliteration. And he was having fun playing with some of the sound, making it sound like scratching a record to a beat. I also asked them to start thinking about other things that they might want to make, if it's song lyrics or more play with images and text or. . . whatever they come up with!

June 5 2002

Day 4

Wednesdays definitely work better than Fridays! Today I had Jennifer, Mike, Beley and Shawna (who came back!). Jennifer had come in earlier and finished up what she'd been working on. We adjusted her animation so that everything runs automatically now instead of having the user fire the next step. Mike was very distractable today. He recorded a couple of sounds to go along with his poem, but I think he's bored, doesn't know what to do next, where to take it. Beley continued with his Hello animation. He's making it more and more complex, so it's kind of cool. . . he started with something really simple, the idea is still really simple, but the code is increasingly complex. I like that it's typography only, it's rather elegant that way. I showed Shawna a couple of examples today to get her up to speed, quickly took her through the other animation stuff I'd

showed people in the meantime, and she jumped right in. It's interesting. . . Jennifer keeps asking what to do, what to make. Shawna asks how and not what, she knows what. Jennifer didn't bring her drawings in, so I suggested she bring those in. . . and also that we do some photography to work with. This is the point where they get the basics, but getting deeper is hard. . . I think with all of the work at the center with games and robotics, it's hard to go into poetry or art. . . I keep facing the "Why?" and that's hard to answer. I mean, why make a game or a robot? It does cool stuff, you can play it. I'm trying to get Jennifer to see connections to the here and now. She's seeing a lot of these things as make-believe, making up stories, poems and she's not like that. She likes things that are real. . . so I suggested making a piece about something real. Hence the photography and bringing in her drawings. I really think I need to make a couple of demoes. . . something real, something cool. . . something compelling to push things to the next level. I don't think I've proved how the environment can be a compelling expressive tool, it's kind of at the simple Claymation in Logo stage still. Cute, but not very interesting after a little while.

It's like what comes up in the group-- how do we get beyond two week workshops? How do we get things to that next, deeper level? I don't know if we as a group have answered that yet. There've only been 4 sessions thus far, but those four have spanned the two weeks, so I guess this is yet another turning point. We've settled into a bit of a routine, people are fairly self-sufficient with simple animations, but what about pushing self-expression to a deeper point? Not just making things for the sake of making them or for the sake of learning the environment but for expression, creation, creativity?

Anyone reading this have ideas or suggestions?

June 10, 2002

Day 5

Roger, Gina and I talked about some of my workshop problems today. One thing that came up with Roger is that in a thesis workshop, there are some automatically non-constructionist elements. We are working with one tool (the one we created) and focusing on one topic. It isn't necessarily going to resonate with everyone and you can't force that. In terms of expression, we want to open up different kinds of expression, not force people into particular types. 100 languages of children and all. . . then there's the issue of is this workshop about full-contact poetry or about the full-contact poetry environment?

Today I wanted to have a non-computer day to go through expression a little bit, encourage them to try different kinds of expression. . . so I had colored pencils, crayons, markers and asked them to make something for a person that they care about. I wanted to keep media options open so that they can use whatever they feel most comfortable with, whether that is through the computer, writing, drawing, music-- anything. We talked a little bit about different ways technology can be used-- to solve problems, to make games, to make movies, stories-- still some sort of wall, though. Beley keeps giving me this quizzical, I'm not sure I get what you're talking about look. Mike drew for a bit, as did Ron who joined in again out of curiosity. Jennifer was late. Mike is interesting, he gives me blank looks most of the time, unless I say something to tease someone (else or make fun of myself), in which case he laughs. He said he can't draw, I asked him about everything he did on the computer and he said "Yeah, but that's on the computer, that isn't drawing."

One of the crucial elements I know is time. I wanted to give everyone time to think about projects, going deeper, what they'd like to do. I feel pressed for time of course since this workshop and my thesis timeline are finite. But I guess there are much bigger issues than a timeline coming up.

Ron drew Wolverine. As he was finishing up his drawing, a school bus pulled up and he handed me the picture and said "I'm done." A kid came by, a few years younger than him and said, "I didn't know you draw." He said, "I don't." "But I saw you drawing." "Nah." When the kid left, Ron took the sketchpad back and finished up his drawing.

Beley said his father is a musician and loves music in response to my asking to make something for a person that they care about. I asked if there was something he could do with that and he said "I heard there are ways computers can transcribe the notes for a person. He does everything by hand. It'd be great if he could have that." We kind of missed each other there in terms of making something for someone. . . he went practical with emotional embedded in it and I was looking for something. . . else.

We all chatted a bit while they were drawing. Mike made a collage as he called it, drew a turntable first, then a samurai, then graffiti all over it. He likes graffiti he said. I asked them what they like to do in their free time. Mike said he likes to sleep, eat and listen to music. After a pause he said he rides his bike, too. I asked if he likes to make music and he said no, just listen. Ron said he plays video games. I asked about fashion, if their clothes are expressive and they said "No. I just wear whatever. . . I have a lot of different styles." We talked a bit about technologies and expression, like a pen and paper can be used to solve equations, write stories, draw, write essays-- all sorts of different things. Same with a computer, you can make games, solve problems, make stories, edit movies-- and they can be of all different genres, silly things like Chicken Run or more

serious dramas like Memento. Quizzical and blank looks. . . some glimmers in there, but I realized that everyone I grew up with and also went to college with did all sorts of things-- dance, theatre, sculpture, comic book art, sports-- and I felt like it was hard to relate.

Jennifer came by after a lot of this conversation. She had wanted to take pictures, so we set her up with a camera. Ron ran off and ran in and out for a lot of it. Jennifer took a lot of pictures and deleted every single one because she didn't like how they turned out. I asked her if she wanted to learn how to frame a shot or how to edit pictures in Photoshop and she said "No." Then she followed up saying she'd bring in some photos from home and some drawings to work with.

Things kind of fell apart there. . . it was more aimless. I went in to do my own thing since Jennifer was taking photos, Mike said he was thinking about what he'd like to do and Beley was playing around with some pictures he'd taken. One good thing is evidently the popularity part is taken care of. Mike came by and stood by me for a few seconds and I looked up and asked if I could help him with anything. He said he was thinking and I asked about what. He paused and then said "Food." The conversation was interesting because he was obviously trying very hard to reach out, but at the same time, just said something facetious at every turn. He was having trouble expressing himself to me in just a conversation. So I asked him what he thought he'd been signing up for and he said he didn't know and I asked what he'd hoped to get out of the workshop and he said he wanted to see something different. I asked if he had and he said yes. I asked him about the environment and he said "You can do anything, make anything, change anything." I asked him if there was anything he wanted to do or make or change and he paused and said "I don't know." I felt like this was a big turning point. I told him even when he's being silly, he has a really good sense of rhyme and rhythm and he paused again and said

"Thank you" like it touched him, like no one had said something like that to him before. I also asked him about Ron and why he always runs off, if it was me, and Mike said, "That's just how he is. He likes to look for things." This time I gave the quizzical look and he said "He always says he lost something and looks everywhere. Comes back then goes off looking again." I felt much better about things.

Then the conversation seemed over so I returned to whatever it was that I was doing and Mike turned on his CD player. His headphones were hanging around his neck and it was turned up so I could hear it. He opened up the disk man and every so often made it skip so it sounded like scratching. I asked him if he'd ever scratched records and he said he has two turntables at home. He'd like better ones but they're expensive, but he likes doing it. I told him about the DJ Robot at the lab in Chris Cziksentmihalyi's group and he liked that. Thinking more I realized that despite all of my deconstructionist tendencies, in workshop mode I was going for straight construction. Mike showed instead of telling his way of expression. Like Ron, it wasn't something he could admit straight out (on the first day he erased his rhythmic alliterative writing when he saw other kids looking-- just Ron and Jennifer) but he did reach out by scratching with his volume turned up. Mike takes someone else's music and makes it his own through scratching. Similarly, he likes graffiti, which is kind of appropriating a space as one's own. It's deconstructing and reconstructing.

Everyone decided what they want to work on during the Wednesday session. Jennifer has her pictures and drawings. I hope Shawna returns since she seems to be the one who has something that she wants to do and just asks me for the hows (funny how I'm concentrating on all of the others whom I'm having more trouble with and not the "success" story. . . I guess because I don't feel I've earned that one and these others I am definitely working for!). Mike will continue what he was working on as will Beley. . .

I'm going to encourage both to play more with the sound elements and try to get together some more Squeak sound stuff. In the past two weeks the mp3 plugin was supposedly stabilized so I'm going to play around with the various sound capabilities and maybe bring in a different version of Squeak, again customized for poetry, and see if we can do much more with music. They can still record and play with sampling. . . but much more is under development right now.

For tomorrow I also have a very structured warm-up exercise. 3 minutes of free-writing (which no one will see except for me). After writing anything for three minutes (it can be nonsense, as long as they don't stop moving their pens), I'll ask them to pick one sentence that they like for its sounds, not for what it says. And then I'd like them to draw and animate how the sentence sounds. So something that sounds hard would be drawn as an object that looks like it's hard, or a squishy sound could be a squishy animation. And then they can add in sound effects to their visualization. Abstract but straightforward. I think I'd like to have some sort of warm-up exercise each of the remaining sessions.

It's hard to force a resonance, but maybe some of these will help open things up. I was hoping that asking people to make something for another person would alleviate some of the personal insecurity or fear of self-expression or uncertainty of what and how to express. . . but it didn't quite work out that way. We'll see how this exercise goes since thus far everything has been completely different from how I'd expected it to go!

I also realized that the poetry writing workshops in which I've participated. . . nothing really happens the first two months. Sometimes a person gets lucky and writes something good. For the most part, people struggle. They try to discover their writing style, what they want to write about, when a style and a subject complement each other.

. . it takes the later months to really delve. I wish I had a few more months with these kids! I'm sure they'd do fantastic things. We keep having little turning points but six weeks is a very short time for anything deep, let alone introducing a new idea and then doing something with it.

Raquel is also coming tomorrow which will shake things up a bit. She's just going to participate in the workshop, but it'll still be someone different and unknown and that'll change the dynamic of our small group.

June 12, 2002

Day 6

Today I had Jennifer, Mike and Shawna and Raquel tagged along to participate and see what exactly these workshops are all about. For once, things sort of went as planned. I started out with the exercise-- had them freewrite for three minutes. I told them no one else would read them including me unless they wanted us to and they could write anything as long as they kept their pens moving, so they could write nonsense, about their day, things they like, things they hate, whatever. I timed the three minutes and then asked them to underline a sentence that they liked the sound of, not the meaning, but how it sounds. Then I asked them to draw the sounds (like a word that sounds hard with a hard looking object, a squishy sounding word as a squishy object that can be squeezed in an animation) and animate them. There was a quick re-underlining and they got to work. What was interesting was that they were completely literal, not abstract. So Jennifer chose the sentence "Hi Mike" and drew a hand waving at Mike. Mike picked "happy happy joy joy" and made an elaborate picture of a field with smiley face flowers with bumble bees spinning around them. Raquel drew a smile, frown and flat face and animated them to be "moodswings" (okay so she's not *really* in the workshop, but since

she participated I'll write her work in). Shawna picked a section about all of the sports she likes and drew a girl standing next to a table with various objects like a star, a rod, a circle, all representing different sports. At this point she said she was stuck and I asked what was going on with the objects. Did the girl try out different things, like some, dislike others? She smiled and went on to draw the girl juggling the objects. She was just starting to work on animation but had to leave. She thinks Mike is crazy and talked a bit more than the previous few days. Mike was definitely much more animated than usual, dancing around the room and stuff. Jennifer was much less animated. She has said that she's just really tired and stressed from end of term tests, etc. Once again, she didn't bring photos or drawings. She was going to make a story, decided on Jurassic Park, found a cute drawing of a kid riding a dinosaur (drawn by a kid) that she imported, and was bored. I asked what happened next, suggested some continuations of stories like "the kid rides the dinosaur to school because he wants to show it off for Show and Tell or the kid decides to chase after a mean babysitter with this new friend" she laughed and said "no."

I asked her what they do and she said "Look at the sky." so she drew in a setting and decided that was it. She asked why I couldn't just give her a story and she'd make it. . . she keeps asking me to tell her what to do and she'll do it. It's tough. . . I gave her a selection of poems and she picked a cute, simple one to animate. If something is hard, she throws it out because she isn't invested in the project since it's just something she picked out of a book. . .

I adapted today's exercise from something Andrew had to do in an art class at ArtIC, except theirs ended in an installation piece and had many more steps (the class is divided into teams but individual must describe a location they pick, then each picks out the 5 most important words, they combine and pass this list to a different group who then

tries to reconstruct the original space as an installation, and they had another about drawing sounds but I don't remember the convoluted assignment specifically). He suggested maybe instead of words, next time to pick sounds like "raaaaaaarrrrrrrrrrrr" to animate instead, pick onomatopoeias. So maybe have the kids pick random words from a hat then represent it using text animation, drawing animation and sound? Since the opening exercise method seemed to work, I'm going to stick with it and try to think up a few more. Adapt traditional writing or art exercises to this. I'm also going to work on getting the mp3 and midi stuff working on my machine-- supposedly it's all stable in Squeak but I haven't had it work yet. There are a few days before the workshop though so it's all good.

We ended early today because Shawna always has to leave early and Jennifer was tired and didn't know where to go with a project and Mike was busy dancing all over the place to the music in his mind (hey, I am completely willing to stop workshop for a kid dancing around a room, especially when he usually has a blank look on his face!), but Raquel and I once again took screen shots and uploaded those.

On the way back, we chatted a little bit about the environment. Raquel was commenting on how the space is very sterile and computer lab, kids are supposed to be quiet, and it's hard to be very creative in a space like that. I said if I had it my way, everyone would have a laptop and a bean bag chair (a very start-up like setup with an endless supply of soda, juice and snacks and a few couches thrown around and wireless ethernet). It reminded me (of course) of the Reggio book on designing learning spaces. This one with its computers in rows just isn't it. That was one of the first things to strike me, so I had the kids sit in a circle on the first day, which they thought was weird, but I couldn't reconfigure the whole space since it is specifically designed for people to work individually and quietly all day. Anyways, so more activities and a little more hacking. . .

and much more reading. I need to track down a few references for my background section. Time to seriously write!

June 17, 2002

Day 7

Today was very low-key. Just Raquel, Jennifer and me. I showed them the holder-animation technique (changing an object's appearance based on where the holder cursor points) and how to import and modify midis-- the instruments, adding in notes, changing the sounds of the instruments themselves. For the exercise, I just asked them to make something to the music. And I played along, making my own alongside them. Jennifer was actually really absorbed, finding songs, and then she changed around all of the instrumentation to what she liked. She spent most of her time finding and playing around with songs. She was very hesitant to let us hear her version and would only let us listen to it one at a time with headphones, and she turned the volume down, but it was cool. Raquel took a salsa song and got rid of every track except for the melody which she translated into a drum sound. And then she was trying to get images to change in time to the music. Jennifer picked Destiny's Child's "Survivor" because as she says "I'm a survivor." She said she swam over from Puerto Rico (joking, she came over at age 2). Again, she kept asking what I wanted her to do next, and she picked up on a facetious suggestion to show herself as a baby swimming over from Puerto Rico, since she's a survivor. She started drawing babies, didn't like them, got rid of them, and then started over trying to find a picture of a Puerto Rican baby, but again, had trouble finding satisfactory images online. Anyways, so that's her plan. I was also doing the same, playing around with a song and getting ideas together for my "music video." I was actually just "doodling" which. . . I guess Mike does, but I'm not sure how to get Jennifer to experiment. I think a lot of that is just comfort, both with the tool and with what others

see of her work. Oh, Mike's in Maine right now visiting his mother since he normally lives with his grandmother in Boston. Raquel commented that Jennifer seems to just want to talk to me all the time. Yes, like any teenage girl, she's very chatty. The interesting thing is that she will talk about anything and everything (very expressive in conversation) but when it comes to translating it. . . there's some barrier. Comfort with tools provided? Not knowing that anything goes? She's pretty tough on herself, her own worst critic I'm sure, so that's another part of it. . . putting her own work down before anyone else can.

June 19, 2002

Day 8

Today went well. It was just Jennifer, Shawna and me and the girls worked on making stuff to music. I got Shawna up to speed on playing with midis and she got Aaliyah's Are You That Somebody? to work with. She played with it a lot and made it really funky. She went back and forth between the original and her version trying to figure out how exactly she wanted to do it. Jennifer had her Destiny's Child Survivor already made. She listened to it a few times and then got to work on her project. She wasn't sure what she wanted to do, whether it was the meaning of the song or how she felt about the song. . . we talked about it a little bit and of course she asked me what I wanted her to do and I turned it around on her as usual. Finally she decided she wants someone making muscles, showing how strong that person is, a survivor. She looked online, couldn't find a wimpy person (she wanted to show a wimp->strong change) so I asked if we could take a picture of her making muscles. She agreed after I said no one would see the picture except for the two of us. We got the pictures but had problems with downloads and transferring between computers, so she drew someone making muscles, wearing running pants and a Nike sweatshirt. Then I got all of the other stuff going so she imported the picture of herself and decided she doesn't like how she looks, so she drew

all over it, with SURVIVOR across the top, ARRRRRR across the bottom, different hair, make-up and a pink skirt to show she's "Puerto Rican and likes to dance." The hair was long "and nappy because I haven't brushed it." She imported the original picture again so that she could show the transformation. Again, she was stuck, so we talked about what the story was. I asked why the transformation occurred-- did someone threaten her and she turned tough? Is she just always tough? She decided her drawing, the guy in the Nike clothes, was threatening a baby so then she transformed and took care of him. So she has herself in original, untransformed form (she objected to my calling it the wimpy version *laugh*) and then the guy going after a baby with STOMP STOMP STOMP STOMP flashing and then the tough version appears. She isn't done yet, but what impressed me was that instead of ending exactly at 5, the girls went on until 5:20 at which point I asked them if they needed to be anywhere. Shawna usually has to leave by 4:30 but she was so involved with making her song her own way that she lost track of time and her mother came by looking for her. Shawna let her mum hear what she was working on and she was entertained, then her mum asked when she'd finish up and could she run some errands for her at 5? Shawna agreed to pick up some groceries and went back to what she was doing. She was drawing some stuff and just getting started on an animation when I realized she was supposed to have left already, so I invited them to stop by and work on their projects whenever in the meantime. Jennifer thought the workshop was going on all summer, so she was surprised that there's only a week left. I think it was good to just have the girls today. . . it was much safer. Jennifer and Mike got into a fight on Friday and they're working things out over email, but I'm sure it would've been hard for them to make stuff while everything was unresolved. Jennifer has a boyfriend, but sometimes the two of them act like they're dating. In terms of how they bicker. Jennifer says it's because they've been friends since 6th grade, so it's an issue of being close but not being totally secure. I suggested she could make a full-contact poem

about her Mike issues when she didn't know what to make to Survivor and she considered it. Oh, Gilbert, someone who works at the center, was laughing at her narrative and I said if he didn't watch it, she'd incorporate him and go after him in her narrative instead, which she backed immediately and said she'd have her bad guy stomp all over him instead of the baby. It turned out to be a good way of turning things around so she didn't feel uncertain or bad about her work (since she's been so negative about everything she's been making thus far) and instead went on the offensive. Instead of hiding what she was doing, she went back to it with a vengeance.

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