Diving head first into Scratch – and hoping it's not the shallow end!

Marina wrote an inquiry exploring the ways we could use computational thinking in the writing workshop process. I was thinking along similar lines and agree with much of what she has to say about the value of bringing computational thinking concepts into that process. However, as I begin to explore Scratch, I find myself appreciating the potential for a more fluid, messy, recursive process that reminds me of the writing process. In other words, I think the bridge between the two may go both ways.

For example, the rubric for the "about me" project calls for a planning document and a sketch of your project vision. I did not actually complete this step, though I did mentally brainstorm ideas for what I wanted to do. I would like to suggest that this document may not be a critical first step, even though computational thinking involves planned, orderly, logical sequencing of steps. However, I began by acting on a spark that ignited my interest and pursuing it. As I did so, I ran into roadblocks that I had to solve. I experienced constraints related to my own skill level, the resources available to me, and the capacities of the program. These constraints pushed me to innovate and explore directions I had not previously planned. As I immersed myself more deeply, I ended up in places that I could not possibly have planned in advance.

At the same time, I did compile ideas and component parts that I ended up not using. By way of illustration, I have an entire library of photos I assembled that I thought I might use. And at the end I did question whether I had pushed on one aspect to the detriment of another. Notably, this concern was echoed

by my severest critic – my 12-year old child, who told me in no uncertain terms that he did not believe I had fulfilled the assignment and that I had failed to share critical aspects "about me". He far preferred the clickable components of other projects that my classmates had produced.

I do not think, though, that this justifies the necessity of the planning document. Instead, I think it shows the value of simply beginning and seeing where you land. The challenge is that this should not be the end of the process. Instead, that open-ended exploration should become the first draft. The notes and files and resources accumulated along the way become new source material to be integrated. You now have an array of materials from which to choose. It is at this point, in my opinion, that you can begin to sort, prioritize, and sequence. It is from this that a planning document can emerge.

I see a connection between this and the ways in which my ideas about writing process and pedagogy were upended in a series of courses I took last year. I learned writing in a way that followed a very specific set of structures. I learned writing process as a series of steps starting with reading, brainstorming, outlining, and drafting, and then moving through cycles of revision and editing. Though, truth be told, I spent so much time on the planning and drafting stages that I was always sick of myself before I could get close to anything called revising. And I learned the formulas well and was good enough that I could get away with it. I produced polished, generally well-crafted writing (according to a very specific and narrow set of somewhat arbitrary standards of "good English") and was rarely pushed to revise in anything other than a surface way. It was a painful, slow process, but it seemed to work. It is only in the last several years that I realized how much of a loss it was that I was bound to this process and that I avoided revision like the plague.

It began with free writing, Peter Elbow *(Writing Without Teachers)* and Asou Inoue (*AntiRacist Writing Assessment*

Ecologies). In free writing, you begin without an idea or a plan. Instead, Elbow emphasizes writing as a way of thinking. You don't think and then display your knowledge via written text. Instead, you write to work through your ideas and develop your understanding and then you revise in order to share those ideas. I see the process I described employing in the "about me" project as an example of this. There are several advantages to this approach. One is that it helps break through writers' (or coders'?) block. You don't need to worry if it will work or how it will sound or even know what you want to say. You just begin. And as you begin, you work your way into a clearer idea of what you want to do. Some of what you produce will not be good, but some will be. But once you have material, you can begin to cull. Another advantage is that it keeps your mind open to new ideas. When we begin with a map and an intended destination, we might ignore side routes that could be quite valuable. In writing, if we have a thesis sentence to defend, we might resist the dawning realization that perhaps that wasn't quite right after all. We will have locked into an initial, perhaps rigid or reactive, set of ideas. We may find ourselves creating well-developed, fully-explicated, beautifully crafted arguments while fending off sprouts of doubt. A final advantage is that you allow yourself multiple options for how to present your ideas. You can see your writing as a series of component parts (like codes of block) that can be arranged in different ways for various effects.

A final thing I am thinking and excited about is the process of revision. Here, I think Scratch's use of "remixing" is incredibly helpful as a framework. Every project can be seen as in flux and open to further development. It can also be seen as in conversation with others.

I think there are some learners for whom the logical, pre-planned sequencing of computational thinking may make the writing process more accessible and digestible. I agree with

everything Marina says about how we can leverage this in the writers' workshop. But I also think there are learners who need to first be freed from constraints in order to learn and then later and productively embrace them. These two worlds have much to share with each other and I think both can benefit from some troubling of commonly held assumptions.

What opportunities and challenges do you see regarding introducing this project to your students? I see an opportunity for visual learners and ELLs to access knowledge that might be more difficult via traditional print text in English. One challenge is that while many aspects of the program are intuitive, I think it could be challenging to

figure out the precise place where desired actions aren’t being triggered by your code.

How did it feel to be led through a step-by-step tutorial to make something? I liked it, but I still wanted to explore beyond the instructions. I chose a sprite that didn’t have any additional costumes, so I had to look up how to create new costumes for my sprite. I also had some challenges that required me to look up answers online and then replay the tutorial to make sure I had it right. ☞ Compare this project to the 10-blocks project. How are they different? The 10-blocks project was more immersive. It’s hard to assess because the time constraints made it hard to visualize an end goal before beginning. I had an idea of what I wanted to do, but didn’t have the knowledge or time to do it. I liked the tutorials, but if I were exploring this on my own I would use them on an as-needed basis to address difficulties that arose.

What was difficult about only being able to use the 10 blocks provided to you? It was more difficult to get all 10 blocks in during the 5 minutes allotted. With more time I might have found it difficult to get the transitions I wanted.

Did you find yourself following the individual steps of the debugging process? Why or why not? Yes and no. I followed the first 3 steps almost every time. But I also had to experiment with different blocks to figure out what was going wrong and how to fix it. Because I am new to many of these functions, this process of experimentation helped me to understand the different blocks better.

In a few sentences describe what your Scratch Program says about you. Well, I went in a “creative” direction for this. I chose to spend my time/space describing the importance of social justice to my life and how that shapes who I am. ☞ What is one new thing in Scratch you learned while creating this program? I mean, I spent HOURS on this, so a lot! I learned how to convert a video into gifs and then import the images to

make a slide show & then upload audio & coordinate the images and audio together. I also learned how to create "if…then" scripts. I'm looking forward to how to create a library with repeating scripts as I have a feeling that a lot of this could have been done a lot faster.

How did you incorporate an orange square and a purple circle into your program? Where did this idea come from? I wanted to use them as pieces for a game of tic tac toe. I only got as far as setting up the backdrop and concept. I made different color dots because then I thought I could use conditional statements to have each sprite perform a particular action based on what color the mouse pointer went to (i.e., where the participant moved). I assigned the user to be the circle and I was going to have the program be the square. After the user moved the circle to a color dot, I would broadcast a message to trigger the program to make a move based on where the user moved. After that move, I would have the system say, "now it's your turn". I would have a conditional statement that moved the circle to where the user clicked and then broadcast back to the program's turn. OBVIOUSLY this is way more than could be accomplished by a novice in 5 minutes!!! (I have issues with time blindness combined with being overly ambitious) ☞ What is the Scratch Paint Editor? It's where you can draw and customize the visual appearance of sprites, backdrops and stages? I think I'm finally understanding stages vs backdrops which was giving me trouble last night.

The World Don't Love You

My response to Makayla's Youth Voices Commentary The World Doesn't Love You; My Mother's Life (Feminist Perspective), a book review of Born A Crime, by Trevor Noah.

Sentence, Phrase , Word

- Patricia lived with a man, slept with a man, loved a man, but still had to do everything on her own.
- So basically when Abel was beating the crap out of Patricia nothing could be done.
- Standard

Brief Reflection :

This goes to show that women are strong and powerful. Noah’s mother is a great example, she raised two kids one by an abusive stepfather who didn’t care about how her day was he just got drunk and beat her like she was nothing.