

# HATS FOR HOUSE ELVES: Connected Learning and Civic Engagement in Hogwarts at Ravelry

by Rachel Cody Pfister



CONNECTED LEARNING  
WORKING PAPERS

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# CONTENTS



4	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>
7	<b>BACKGROUND ON CASE</b>
8	Hogwarts at Ravelry: A History
10	Description of Research Study
10	<b>HOGWARTS AT RAVELRY AND CONNECTED LEARNING</b>
11	Interest-Driven
13	Peer-Supported
15	Academically Oriented
19	Shared Purpose, Culture, Identity
22	Production and Performance
24	Openly Networked
28	<b>SIDEBAR: AMY, THE KNITTING PATTERN AUTHOR</b>
30	<b>REFLECTIONS AND ANALYSIS</b>
30	Connected Learning Environments as Bottom-Up, Created, and Changing
34	Connected Learning Environments and Community Involvement
36	Connected Learning Environments as Gateways for Social Action
39	<b>SIDEBAR: THANH, KNITTING IN VIETNAM</b>
40	<b>CONCLUSION</b>
41	<b>REFERENCES</b>
44	<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b>

# INTRODUCTION

In March of 2012, *Hogwarts at Ravelry* students took an astronomy class in which they learned about planetary bodies, stars, constellations, and phases of the moon. For six weeks, they wrote about the bandings and rings of planets, the orbits of planets in the solar system, and what comets are made of. Students in the astronomy class included middle school students and grandmothers. They knit Neptune-colored hexipuffs (see image below), crocheted representations of the solar system, and knit unicorn gloves to symbolize the Monoceros (the unicorn) constellation. Students

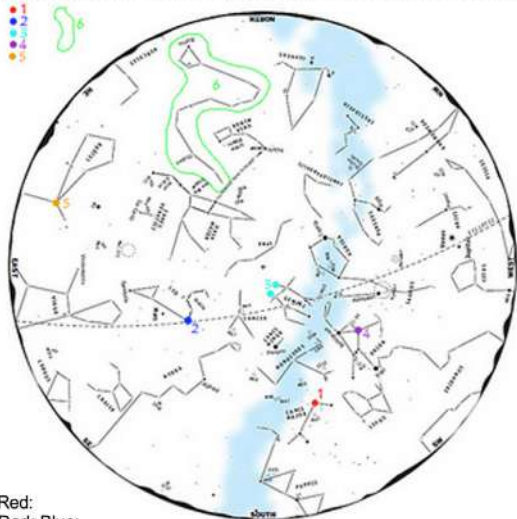


Neptune-colored hexipuffs.  
Image courtesy of KnittingPrincipal.

## Practical Exam

(use March 2012: Northern Edition SkyMap)

What objects are represented in the star chart? The dots are individual stars and the green is the constellation. (click on the picture to zoom closer)



1. Red:
2. Dark Blue:
3. Light Blue (2 answers):
4. Purple: (hint: find the constellation and then cast a google spell on it!)
5. Orange:
6. Green:
7. Your exam was interrupted by Professor Umbridge's attempted sacking of which Hogwart's staff member?
8. Which professor was injured during the fight that ensued?

Professor Briana's astronomy practical exam.  
Image courtesy of Briana.

learned about Sirius the Dog Star, the Bellatrix star, and the Lupus constellation. Finally, after completing their assignments, the students took an exam about astronomy, answering how many moons Jupiter has and what covers the surface of Europa. For the practical section of the exam, the students were given questions about a star chart before Professor Umbridge barged into the class and began a bit of role-play.

The astronomy class was just one of the six-week activities offered at *Hogwarts at Ravelry*, a group on Ravelry.com that combines the interests of *Harry Potter* and fiber crafting (knitting, crocheting, weaving, and spinning). Through the class we can see how *Hogwarts at Ravelry* crosses generations, motivates and propels participation through the shared purpose and interests of its members, and links learning and production with academic achievement. It is a robust connected learning environment.

Connected learning ties together three spheres of learning—academic, peer, and interest—to support young people's learning in a way that is "socially embedded, interest-driven, and oriented toward educational, economic, or political opportunity"

(Ito et al. 2013:4). By tying together these three spheres, learning is cultivated, relevant, empowered, and made resilient. Connected learning environments also have the core properties of being production-centered, openly networked, and providing a shared purpose. Participation is open to everyone, participants are constantly challenged in their interest or skills, learning is embodied and made relevant through production, and learning happens through participation in meaningful activities. These connected learning environments embody principles that researchers have shown to be powerful for learning—collaborative, meaningful activities that support learning through doing (Rogoff 2003).

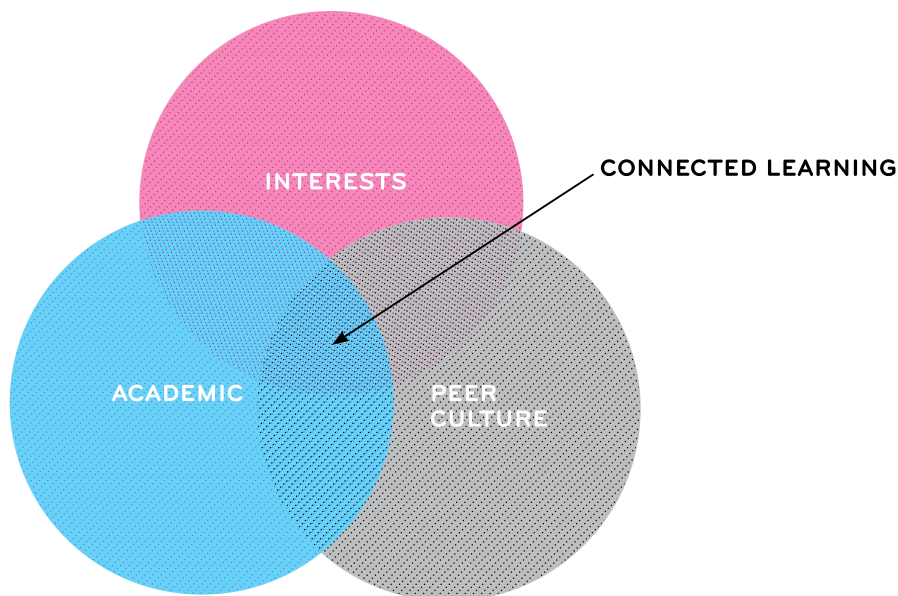


Figure 1  
Connecting the  
Spheres of Learning,  
from Ito et al. 2013

*Hogwarts at Ravelry* was chosen as a case study because it embodies the characteristics and principles of connected learning. The administrators are intentional in fostering a community ethos that supports learning in a way that is highly aligned with the principles of connected learning. The group has more than 1,200 members and approximately 200 active members at any time. The group emphasizes interest-driven research, advancement, and production through its activities, rewards, and fictional world. Members work together to craft items for charities, critically discuss the *Harry Potter* book series, research topics that relate to the *Harry Potter* world, and learn new crafting techniques. They use these skills to open their own craft businesses, participate in larger social-action movements, and communicate their interests and identities.

*Hogwarts at Ravelry* also offers insight into a primarily female, interest-driven, production-centered community. Research on interest-driven communities has proliferated in the last decade, but much of this research has focused on male-dominated and/or the highly technical and “geek” interest-based communities of games, modding, and fan remixing (Ito et al. 2010; Nardi 2010; Pearce and Artemesia 2009; Taylor 2006). *Hogwarts at Ravelry* offers insight into a networked community

that is female dominated and centered on low-tech production. The group combines two seemingly unrelated interests to create a fictional world centered on production, narratives, and community.

This case report is divided into three sections to present and discuss how the *Hogwarts at Ravelry* community functions as a connected learning environment. I will first lay out the background of the case by situating it in the context of the rich social history of fiber crafting, explaining the origins and design of the parent site of Ravelry.com, and explaining the history and design of the *Hogwarts at Ravelry* group. I will also explain the methods used to carry out the research. After laying out the background and methods, I will describe and analyze the features of the *Hogwarts at Ravelry* group that align with the connected learning principles of being an interest-powered, peer-supported, and academically oriented site that has a shared purpose, emphasis on production, and is openly networked. The report will then discuss how *Hogwarts at Ravelry*, as a connected learning environment, provides gateway opportunities for members to connect their interests with outside opportunities for community involvement and civic action.

## BACKGROUND ON CASE

Fiber crafting can be traced back thousands of years, and throughout history it has been an important way for families to create clothes, connect with each other, help others, create art, generate an income, and even become involved in political issues (McDonald 1988; Rutt 2003; Theaker 2006; Wills 2007). The portability and versatility of fiber crafts easily lend them to being incorporated into other activities or causes, such as knitting circles (Parkins 2004; Wills 2007).

Although knitting by hand has waxed and waned through the last century (McDonald 1988), its popularity has surged in the last two decades (Wills 2007). In an era when knit and crocheted goods can be found in any clothing store, one may wonder why anybody would take more than 20 hours to hand-knit a sweater. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, however, Western cultures saw a revitalization of domestic crafts, including fiber crafts. The reasons for the fiber crafting handmade movement are manifold, but they include resistance against mass consumerism, a move toward a “greener” life, artistic innovation and expression, financial necessity brought on by the economic recession, and the popularization of knitting as a “hip trend” by Hollywood and the popular press (Abrahams 2008; Hudson 2010; Lee 2005; Parkins 2004; Stannard 2011; Wills 2007).

With this “handmade revolution,” younger generations have taken up knitting and crocheting, and new crafting books and magazines advertise “modern” and “chic” patterns (Wills 2007). Fiber crafting is no longer just fiber crafting; it is being touted as representative of a young, tech-savvy lifestyle (Seering 2007). The editor of *Mollie Makes*, a “lifestyle and craft” magazine from the United Kingdom, describes this new generation of crafters:

Today’s crafters are creating a whole new aesthetic inspired by a love of retro, vintage and all things handmade. We’re crafting socially in sewing-café’s and clubs, and sharing ideas worldwide via social media and inspiring blogs. More and more of us are selling our own makes via online marketplaces. This is why *Mollie Makes* is so much more than a traditional project book—it’s a lifestyle magazine for the generation who make up the handmade revolution (N.d.).

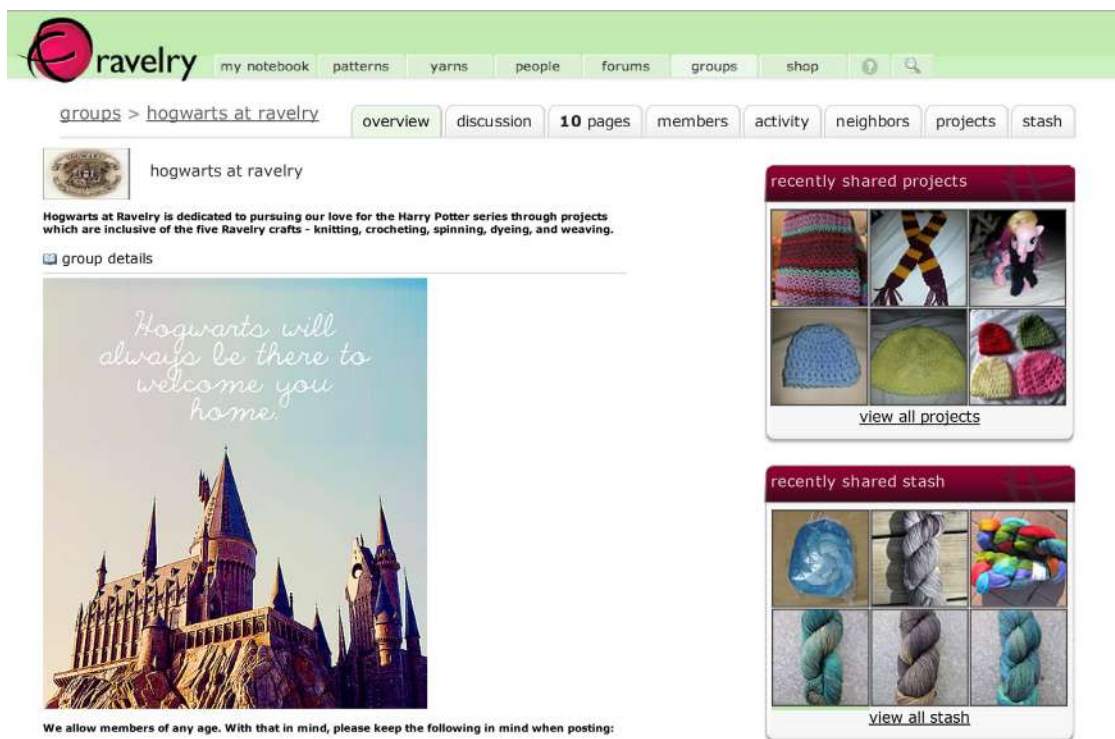
The move online has further propelled the rise of handmade and do-it-yourself (DIY). In 2002, the *Wall Street Journal* featured an article about online craft businesses and “a new generation of crafters making a living off the unlikely marriage of high tech and home crafting” (Schulte 2002). Social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and Pinterest have increased the visibility of fiber crafters and their works. The move of interests online has also increased the accessibility and visibility of fiber crafting resources and allowed crafters to more easily connect with those who share their interests (Ashbrook 2011; Dorrheim 2011; Huffstutter 2000; Postigo 2010; Torrey, Churchill, and McDonald 2009). The advent and huge success of Etsy.com—a site that allows individuals to shop and sell handmade and vintage items—demonstrates the growing popularity of the “handmade revolution” (Abrahams 2008). Etsy, founded in 2005, is worth almost \$700 million, with its worth more than doubling between 2010 and 2012 alone (Thomas 2012). In 2012, members sold nearly \$900 million worth of products through Etsy.com (Davis 2013), and the site had more than a million new



members join the site just in July of 2013 (Etsy 2013). Knitting magazines, fiber crafting apps, “how-to” YouTube videos, knitting websites, and even knitting social networking sites abound online. Perhaps the most popular of these fiber crafting sites is Ravelry.com.

Ravelry was started in 2007 by Jessica and Casey Forbes—a wife and husband team—as a central knitting and crochet hub that would act as both a database for fiber crafting resources and a social network for crafters. As a database, it allows members to keep track of their own projects and materials, find patterns, and add patterns and projects to their favorites. As a social network, it allows members to add each other as friends, join groups, and connect with fiber crafting events local to them. Ravelry.com now has more than 3 million users, 30,000 different groups related to fiber crafting interests, and nearly 120,000 different patterns in its database (Ravelry 2013).

## HOGWARTS AT RAVELRY: A HISTORY



Screen shot of Hogwarts at Ravelry’s main page. Image from Ravelry.com.

What happened was the little girl who started Hogwarts—and it was a little girl, I think she was like ten—Ravelry had an issue with her being the leader of a group. ... So she gave the group to Merida. And that’s when Merida started kind of putting it together and really getting things moving.

—Holly, a pattern designer in Maine and one of the earliest members of *Hogwarts at Ravelry*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> To protect participants’ anonymity, all names are pseudonyms.



Since its founding in July of 2009, *Hogwarts at Ravelry* has been a cross-generational community devoted to the interests of *Harry Potter* and fiber crafting. The group is a fiber craft-based fantasy world that parallels that of the magical wizarding school Hogwarts of J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* book and movie series. Members become students of the fantasy fiber crafting Hogwarts and participate in activities inspired by Rowling's Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. The group uses its message-board design to host classes, magical sports, and even areas for magical creatures as separate conversations, called threads. Members are awarded points for participating in activities, and the points are used in a groupwide competition.

The group has grown to more than 1,200 members, ranging in age from 11 years old to their mid-70s. They are all women, though some of the members interviewed said men have been in the group in the past. The members come from all over the world, with many of the key active participants coming from the United States, Canada, the UK, Australia, and France. Although the primary language of the group is English, members have posted and discussed things with each other in other languages.

forums > hogwarts at ravelry group

overview discussion 10 pages members activity neighbors projects stash

This board search

1 2 3 ... 13

start a topic subscribe

topic	activity	unread	posts	status
POTTERWATCH	12 mins ago	3364	3364	★
DHM Challenge - Interhouse Unity Y7, R7	21 mins ago	67	67	★
Platform 9 3/4	2 hours ago	5	5	★
Order of the Phoenix - Year 7	2 hours ago	917	917	★
Storyline: Ravenclaw Tower (Y7, R7)	3 hours ago	9	9	★
The Hogwarts Historical Society	3 hours ago	1954	1954	★
Hogwarts Announcements	3 hours ago	14	14	★
Dumbledore's Army/SDWM (Charity)	3 hours ago	1144	1144	★
Storyline: Hogsmeade (Y7, R7)	16 hours ago	9	9	★
Hunting Horcruxes - Year 7	2 days ago	173	173	★
Riding A Dragon!?!	4 days ago	755	755	★
Marauder's Map - Year 7	9 months ago	1	1	★
Gryffindor Safe House- year 7	37 mins ago	1292	1292	★
RAVENCLAW SAFE HOUSE	53 mins ago	4535	4535	★
The Seven Cauldrons	1 hour ago	897	897	★
HUFFLEPUFF SAFE DEN YR 7	3 hours ago	10627	10627	★
SLYTHERIN SAFE HOUSE	3 hours ago	2548	2548	★
HM Challenge - Rotation 6 IHU	4 hours ago	255	255	★
Storyline: Gringott's (Y7, R6)	11 hours ago	485	485	★

group board

Hogwarts at Ravelry is dedicated to pursuing our love for the Harry Potter series through projects which are inclusive of the five Ravelry crafts - knitting, crocheting, spinning, dyeing, and weaving. More...

chat room

chat room is empty  
last message: about 1 month ago

moderators

*The message-board format of the group. Classes, such as Potions, are posted as threads on the larger board. Screen shot from Hogwarts at Ravelry.*

The group is a low-floor, high-ceiling community (Resnick et al. 2009) in that it welcomes members of all experience levels—including those who are just learning to fiber craft—as well as those who know advanced techniques or who have even published crafting books. Experienced fiber crafters lend their support and resources to everyone, and the atmosphere is supportive and friendly.

## DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY

The research at *Hogwarts at Ravelry* started in the fall of 2011 and it continued until the spring of 2013. I discovered *Hogwarts at Ravelry* while searching for active fiber crafting groups that fostered a sense of community around an interest. For the research, I used practices of deep immersion and active participation to better understand the activities, practices, and social community of the group (Boellstorff 2008; Nardi 2010; Pearce and Artemesia 2009). I visited the group multiple times each week and recorded observations of activities, interactions, resource sharing, learning, and my reflections in field notes. I conducted 24 semistructured interviews with members to better understand their experiences in *Hogwarts at Ravelry* and in fiber crafting. At the direction of the leader of the group, 43-year-old KnittingPrincipal from Idaho, I made a thread and asked for interviews. In addition to the thread, interviewees also referred their friends to me, and I sought out less active and younger members to individually ask for interviews. Interviews were conducted via Ravelry private messages, instant messaging programs, Skype, and email. The interviewees range in age from 17 to 49 years old, are all women, and live in the United States, Canada, the UK, Vietnam, and France. English is the second language of two of the interviewees. Field notes and interviews were analyzed and coded for members' learning and development, interactions, resource sharing, and experiences in the group.

## HOGWARTS AT RAVELRY AND CONNECTED LEARNING

Connected learning exists at the overlap of the three spheres of learning: interests, academic, and peer culture. As Ito et al. (2013) explain, "We propose that bringing together and integrating the motivations, content, and abilities from social, interest-driven, and formal educational spheres can expand the reach of meaningful and sustained learning" (p. 63). Connected learning environments combine the properties of the three learning spheres to maximize learning by making it meaningful, salient, and supported.

*Hogwarts at Ravelry* provides an environment for learners that integrates these three spheres. Within the fantasy crafting school of *Hogwarts at Ravelry*, members collaborate with peers to build a fantasy world that is based on their interests. The activities encourage members to learn and advance skills in research, reading, writing, and digital media production. Through participation in the community, members also learn and use valuable social skills, including collaboration and community organizing. The community of *Hogwarts at Ravelry* and the larger site of Ravelry help members pursue and connect their interests to academic, economic, and future pursuits. Unexpectedly, in the two years of research with *Hogwarts at Ravelry*, I also discovered that members routinely use their *Harry Potter* and crafting interests to engage in community and charitable causes and have even found themselves unintentionally involved in political activities. In this section, I will go through each of the connected learning principles for a more in-depth look at *Hogwarts at Ravelry* as a connected learning environment.

## INTEREST-DRIVEN

Many youth seek out a community based on their interests or discover an interest while participating in a community. The supports for cultivating these interests can be diverse—from peers, to parents, to formal institutions, crossing multiple spheres and contexts of daily life. Youth are passionate about and driven to engage in and advance their interests, fueling their learning about and expertise in the interest area (Ito et al. 2013). The Internet allows communities to form around and converge on particular interests, providing youth a community that shares their interests or complements local groups. *Hogwarts at Ravelry* features a community that is supportive and enthusiastic about *Harry Potter* and fiber crafting, and that integrates and supports academic and career-oriented goals related to those interests.

While the pairing of fiber crafting and *Harry Potter* surprised me at first, participating in the group made me quickly realize how pervasive fiber crafting—especially knitting—is in the *Harry Potter* book and movie series. Fiber crafting can be seen in the scarves, hats, sweaters, cardigans, and even blankets of the movies and books. *Hogwarts at Ravelry* creatively weaves together these interests to create a fantasy craft-based Hogwarts. Members can seamlessly intertwine their interests as they craft snitches for Quidditch or pixies for a Defense Against the Dark Arts class.

Through *Hogwarts at Ravelry*, we can see how passion for one interest can provide a gateway to a related interest. For example, Honestpuck, a 33-year-old from Ohio, took up knitting because of her interest in *Harry Potter* and desire to make her own Hogwarts house scarf. She had learned to crochet as a child, but the Hogwarts house scarves are knit—not crocheted. It was Honestpuck's passion for *Harry Potter* that became the gateway to and motivation for learning to knit.

Then came *Harry Potter*. I HAD TO HAVE THAT SCARF! Alas, I couldn't knit, and didn't have time to learn, really. No one in my family could knit. My grandmother said "I know how, but it takes forever, and I hate it. Just stick with crochet." So I crocheted the scarf. It bothered me that it wasn't screen accurate. But I gave it to my sister for Christmas, and she loved it. The desire to learn knitting was planted, however.

A passion for *Harry Potter* has also been a motivating force for other members for creative production and learning new skills related to their fiber crafting interest. Like Honestpuck, Amy, a 17-year-old in Colorado, was also motivated by the *Harry Potter* movies to create specific items she saw the characters wear. Inspired by a hat that Hermione wore in the movie *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1*, Amy designed a pattern that replicated the hat and posted the pattern on Ravelry.com. The pattern has become very popular—with more than 1,100 people adding the hat to their "favorites" list, 400 people adding it to their queue of things to make, and more than 200 people having already started the hat.

Members are often pushed to learn new skills or try new things in one or both of the community's interests. At the beginning of this case study, I highlighted an astronomy course at *Hogwarts at Ravelry*. This course, like many of the activities at *Hogwarts at Ravelry*, pushes members to deepen their *Harry Potter* knowledge through researching various aspects of the content world, including character names, subjects the characters would learn about at school, or magical creatures or plants. For example, member K1 researched the constellation Lupus—the wolf constellation—as part of Professor Briana's astronomy class. Through the class, she learned that many *Harry Potter* characters are named after stars, and the name of the character Remus Lupin is a play on the Latin word for wolf—*Lupus*.

Conversely, the group's *Harry Potter*-centric activities often push members to advance their fiber crafting skills to tie in with their *Harry Potter* interests. Merenwen, a 21-year-old in Canada, described how the *Harry Potter*-centric assignments drove her to create a bobbed pillow, reminiscent of the bobbles of the *Harry Potter* plant:

One thing I remember having to learn for a specific assignment was bobbles. The assignment was about gillyweed, and one of the options was to craft bobbles, so I started a bobbed pillow using a pattern from the book *Stitch N Bitch Nation*. I figured out the bobbles myself, but I'd asked my mom for help when I noticed that I was short a stitch in one of my rows. I finished the piece much later - I handed it in for partial credit, which was 5 points for my house - but I haven't bought a pillow form and seamed it up quite yet.

Interests can also be the motivating force behind seeking out and joining communities that share those interests. For Briana, a 25-year-old pattern designer from Utah, her interests in *Harry Potter* and fiber crafting led her to finding *Hogwarts at Ravelry*. Although she had been a member of a Pattern Testing Group on Ravelry, it was *Hogwarts at Ravelry* that provided her a sense of community and a place to engage in her interests in a fun way. Briana was already a proficient fiber crafter and already a fan of *Harry Potter*, but the combination of those interests led her to seek out and join a group that provided social supports for the interests. The combination of interests and her pattern-designing business led to Briana's being one of the most active students of *Hogwarts at Ravelry* and quickly led to her being promoted to a teacher. As Briana described it, "I've always loved *Harry Potter*, and I like that making things related to *Harry Potter*. It's something fun to do while I'm designing stuff, you know? And just talking to people is fun because I'm not lonely while knitting."

For Briana, combining her interests of *Harry Potter* and pattern designing motivated creative production that tied the two together. Her new role as a teacher encouraged her to advance her knowledge of the *Harry Potter* universe to create assignments related to it.

Through *Hogwarts at Ravelry*, we are able to see how interests are a significant grounding force for the creation, joining, sustaining, and enriching of the community

as members join and converge around their shared interests. For members, their passions for and involvement in their interests often become gateways into other interests, generating a motivating force for developing new skills and engaging in creative production.

## PEER-SUPPORTED

In connected learning environments, young learners are connecting and engaging with their peers. Engaging in an interest with others who are on “equal footing” (Ito et al. 2013:64) is a powerful support for learning. In a peer-supported environment, members collaborate and share resources and expertise. They also offer feedback. Being with peers creates a fun and motivating environment in which to hang out or mess around (Ito et al. 2010). Although the concept of “peers” means age segregation in some contexts, in interest-driven online communities, it is not unusual to have cross-generational peers.

At *Hogwarts at Ravelry*, members range in age from girls in middle school to women who are grandmothers. Beyond the occasional mentions of life events, however, such as school frustrations or excitement over a new grandbaby, most members do not know or care about the age of other members. They are all *Harry Potter* fans and fiber crafters, and this is what makes them peers. The group prides itself on being a positive, supportive, and family-friendly environment where members with varying levels of experience and commitment can participate in activities. KnittingPrincipal, the leader of *Hogwarts at Ravelry*, explained this atmosphere, “I just want to figure out a way to make people realize that they don’t have to craft everything or earn hundreds of points for their houses. It’s more important that they play and know that we love them!”

The ways in which members support each other are many and varied, from fiber crafting and *Harry Potter* to daily life. Pilots, a 21-year-old member in Oregon, says that *Hogwarts at Ravelry* members are a great resource for her fiber crafting. “They are my go-to places when I’m stuck.” Earth, a 21-year-old member in Illinois, says that the group offers her a safe space where she feels comfortable saying and asking what she wants:

It’s an active group and even now, I still relate to them a lot. We talk a lot and ask a lot of questions in different threads about all sorts of things. It’s a place I go where I feel safe to say what I want, for the most part.

One way in which *Hogwarts at Ravelry* fosters this atmosphere of peer support at the group level is through its house system. Paralleling the *Harry Potter* series, new members are sorted into four separate houses—Gryffindor, Ravenclaw, Hufflepuff, and Slytherin—each of which has its own “common room” thread. By being placed in a subcommunity, members may feel a stronger sense of individualized support from their peers. In one message for new sorts to Ravenclaw, the Head of House Jonah offered a hearty welcome of support and advice:

*dramatic horn music signals something important*

**\*\* WELCOME NEW RAVENCLAWS! \*\***

We are so glad to have you! Please pull up a chair. You can pick your dormitory room later.

I can't wait to see what wonderful creations our new Claws will share. I am constantly inspired by the things other people are making and learning.

I'm sure you have questions, so please ask away. We are here to help.

### **OLD RAVENCLAWS**

What would be your favorite tip or bit of advice for our new sorts?

Older members responded with encouragement and general advice:

Welcome new 'Claws!!!

Turn in what you can, but don't stress out if you can't. We all support each others varying abilities and the things that produces.

(I'm horrible at turning things in on time =( )

One member went a step further and looked up the profile and existing projects for the new Ravenclaws. This allowed her to offer specific support to each new member:

Welcome, my friend. I see you are working on the buttered toast scarf. Did you know that you can also enter each slice of "Toast" as a "Lovegood Square" in the Visiting Wizard hall? You can be awarded points for each completed block. Good luck with everything, and welcome to Ravenclaw Tower!

From their first moments, new members find themselves in a rich, supportive, and welcoming atmosphere where their peers offer help, suggestions, and feedback to enjoy and succeed in the group. Experienced members offered a general level of support and advice, and one member provided specific mentorship to a newcomer. These introductions to Ravenclaw also modeled the valued norms for the house, including being friendly, offering advice, and welcoming questions.

Although the house system offers a subcommunity of support, *Hogwarts at Ravelry* members find support from one another throughout the group. For example, when KnittingPrincipal was learning to design her own knit squares, another member explained how to design them using Excel charts and then sent a premade Excel chart to her: "I just use an Excel spreadsheet and color in the squares! Pretty low-tech, but it works well for me! jen2291 helped me get started with it—sent me her file with just a blank chart on it—it really makes it easy!"

Members find the support and resources of their peers to be useful for more than just individual projects. For a few members who are selling or wish to sell patterns, finding inspiration, support, and feedback from the community is instrumental in creating, testing, refining, and selling patterns. Honestpuck points to the importance of this



peer support in her pattern-selling goals: “I’m going to need to be more active online to network and to exchange skills, experiences and support so I can keep producing the sort of work I enjoy so very much!”

The community and support also extend far beyond the formal boundaries of the group. *Hogwarts at Ravelry* offers a safe space for sharing, resources, and encouragement as members apply for jobs, finish their high school or college homework, welcome a new baby, struggle with a child’s sickness, or grieve the loss of a husband. Members consider each other friends, sending messages, even calling or meeting in person. Pilots hopes to meet other members in person one day: “It feels like such a real community.”

Echoing that sentiment, Jen2291, a 49-year-old member in Arizona, says:

I love the social aspect. Since I don’t get to talk to real live people very often ... the groups are my coffee klatch and watercooler all rolled into one. lol. It helps keep me sane to be able to talk with folks ... and to have them understand my fondness for yarn is a huge bonus. I can joke, I can share my projects, and I can ask for sympathy if I’ve had a hard day. And trust me, my husband is happy I have an outlet. lol. I can peruse projects at 3am, dream of challenge ideas, and feel part of something larger than just me sitting here by myself.

Through the group, members find support from their peers in all of the group’s activities and interests, but they also find peer support for their lives beyond fiber crafting and *Harry Potter*. Several of the women combined squares they each knit—literally across the world—to stitch together a blanket for a member’s new grandbaby. High school and college-age members have traded homework advice. When my younger daughter was born, the veteran moms of the group offered tips and support on how to juggle having a toddler and a newborn. An 11-year-old opened a “study hall” where members could ask questions and share resources. And many of the women have made and donated hats for cancer patients in honor of one member’s lost husband. The relationships and supports built in the community further their interests and skills, but they also go far beyond the fiber crafting and *Harry Potter* interests. By offering such a community, *Hogwarts at Ravelry* members feel supported as they take on new challenges in crafting and in life, and they feel safe to open up and trade resources and advice with each other.

## ACADEMICALLY ORIENTED

In addition to interest and peer support, connected learning environments also tie into academic, career, and civic pursuits. Academics encompasses more than school-based and formal learning, however. It also includes the “work” of young people—future-oriented skills and activities—that is, driven by outside institutions of power, assessments, and instruction. This separates the academic sphere from that of the peer and interest-driven learning spheres (Ito et al. 2013).



When looking at the academic sphere in relation to *Hogwarts at Ravelry*, one sees a certain irony in that the group is set up to be a fantasy school. Members role-play as students, attend classes, and fulfill assignments—all as interest-driven activities. Members trade resources for fiber crafting in the group’s Study Hall, they turn in quizzes, remind peers of deadlines and assignment due dates, and have pride in the number of points they have earned through classes. As part of participating in this fantasy school, members learn, use, and hone many academically oriented skills.

Through the classes, members learn and use research and writing skills to fulfill assignments and enrich their fantasy world. The fantasy world is created through its members’ words and made rich through the interweaving of members’ imaginations and their knowledge of *Harry Potter*’s world. As part of this world building, members research *Harry Potter* using the books, online wikis, and other writings from J. K. Rowling to enrich their narratives. Classes often encourage this research as assignments ask specific questions from the *Harry Potter* books or subjects that *Harry Potter* took at Hogwarts. For example, in KnittingPrincipal’s Bibliomagic course, she asked students to research and craft something related to the ancient Royal Library of Alexandria as well as the *Harry Potter* Durmstrang Institute. In Nalia’s Ancient Runes class, she asked students to learn about the Celtic Ogham runic alphabet. For both classes, teachers asked students to research magical institutions and magical runes, but they also made visible the magic of our own world with its libraries and historical alphabets. To build the magical world and encourage research, the teachers provided links to online resources and the students read up on and reported back about these subjects and how they tie into crafted items.



*Myriam researched the Library of Alexandria, reported back on what she learned, and tied her research to a crafted item. Image courtesy of Myriam.*

Members also build writing skills as they use narrative and role-playing to participate in the group and help build the fantasy world. In a Quidditch assignment, for example, Amy tied together her knowledge of Quidditch teams of the *Harry Potter* universe, a crocheted hat, and role-play:

During our summers, I'm a mentor of a pee-wee Quidditch group for young aspiring Quidditch players. The team is the Kittens of Kenmare, a baby-sibling-team tied to The Kenmare Kestrels. I created this white kitten helmet - which is their mascot - for our newest player: 2-year-old Finny Aofigan.

Other activities require more extensive role-playing and creative writing. In the Order of the Phoenix Game, students complete research, writing, and crafting tasks to become members of the Order of the Phoenix and then complete missions. In Jen2291's dossier for the game, we see her skillfully weave together Harry Potter facts about the Peverell family, her character's persona, and even references to Edgar Allen Poe's works:

- family background - Pure blood, of course, descended directly from Antioch Peverell - the most powerful of the brothers. The rest of the family is so boring really, and mother has such a fascination for muggles - of all things. So quaint. *snorts*
- career goals (if known) - Auror. I'm simply disgusted by those Death Eaters using blood status as an excuse to curse people left and right. It's a privilege to be pure blood, certainly, but really! These idiots running around with all this random wand waving are giving the rest of us a bad name. When I curse someone, I want them to deserve it by their own action!
- any other information which might be relevant - I have a special talent for Transfiguration, and I'm a registered animagus... also a Raven. (I spent so much time with my Patronus last time the Dementors left Askaban I decided to become one. Of course, no one wants me rapping at their chamber door!)

*Hogwarts at Ravelry* activities also ask, support, and reward members for modifying or creating their own patterns—tasks that can be quite math intensive. An important element of fiber crafting is gauge, or how many stitches exist in an inch of work. Gauge is important to making sized items—such as clothing—and replicating patterns. If a member is coming up with her own pattern, has a different gauge than a pattern, or wants to make a size that is not included in a pattern, she can use her gauge to calculate (or recalculate) how to create or change a pattern. Teachers award bonus points to members who design their own patterns, working measurements and shapes from scratch, and members offer advice and support for others who are modifying or creating items. For example, prompted by a large challenge, one member decided to try to make a jumper (sweater) that she had attempted before but had not been happy with. She referred to the work of another member to figure out how to shape the sweater and then took her own measurements, the pattern, and the other member's work to come up with modifications to make the pattern work for her. She then posted her modifications in her notes so that other members could use her formula to re-create the modifications. Part of the notes read:

On the size jumper you are making, figure out total cast on you will start with (C).  
Using size diagram, figure out the cm/inch measurement of the top line that is

the shoulder seam part on one side. (A)

Using size diagram, figure out the measurement of the back of the neck part of the original cast on in cm/inch (B).

Back of neck measurement  $a + 2 * (\text{shoulder seam measurement } b) = \text{total measurement of first cast on in pattern } c$ .

$$A + (2B) = C$$

Use your stitch/inch gauge to convert measurement to # of stitches.

Through the challenge and other members, this member was prompted to make the jumper, found support in modifying it to fit her needs, and then shared her modifications with the rest of the group.

In addition to fostering skills relevant to formal educational institutions, *Hogwarts at Ravelry* also supports members' career and economic goals, such as pattern selling. Ravelry itself has a feature that allows members to sell patterns through the site, and *Hogwarts at Ravelry* offers pattern designers support, inspiration, and camaraderie to help them in their economic or career-related goals. The group has a special thread for the "shopkeepers" of the group, providing links to their shops, offering badges for "official shopkeepers," and offering a space for pattern designers to post their newest patterns. KnittingPrincipal, who learned to design knit squares with the support of a fellow *Hogwarts at Ravelry* member, also used the shopkeeper thread to recruit other members to beta test her patterns.



*KnittingPrincipal's Harry Potter-inspired design for a knit square. Image courtesy of KnittingPrincipal.*

Briana joined *Hogwarts at Ravelry* as a fun alternative to her business-oriented groups, but she also finds the group to be inspirational and helpful in her pattern-designing business. Briana actually uses a separate Ravelry group to recruit beta testers, but *Hogwarts at Ravelry* offers her a welcome fiber crafting respite from her pattern business, which in turn helps motivate and inspire her in her pattern designing because it keeps fiber crafting interesting. Within a few months of joining, Briana was quickly the top achiever in her *Hogwarts* house and was promoted to the role of teacher. Through *Hogwarts at Ravelry*, she finds inspiration for new projects

and motivation to continue crafting through the classes and rewarding point system. Briana also tests patterns for other *Hogwarts at Ravelry* members, learning or honing important skills for her own pattern designing, such as color-work designs. Briana also learned to knit because of a Hogwarts house activity and even designed a pattern for a chocolate frog box (a popular candy in the *Harry Potter* series) for the group, potentially exposing her to new audiences for pattern customers. Even for members who are not directly benefiting in their pattern-designing businesses, the group can be an important source of support, inspiration, and camaraderie that indirectly supports their business efforts.

Finally, *Hogwarts at Ravelry* offers members opportunities and activities related to community engagement, civic action, and political involvement. I will elaborate on these civic opportunities later in the report, but the group encourages and rewards members to craft goods for local causes, recognizing particularly charitable members through badges, and it even has group-organized activities for charities. In the summer of 2012, some members of *Hogwarts at Ravelry* joined Ravelympics, a Ravelry-organized craft-along that encouraged Ravelers to watch and support the Olympic Games. The craft-along unexpectedly became a space of political action, offering a gateway for *Hogwarts at Ravelry* members to move into a space of political discussion and action.

Through their faux school, members engage in a number of educationally relevant skills such as research, creative writing, and even math. Members also find inspiration, support, and an audience for their business and economic goals through pattern testing. Finally, the group encourages, organizes, and rewards members who engage in community and civic causes and even provides gateway opportunities for larger organized civic action.

## SHARED PURPOSE, CULTURE, IDENTITY

One of the core properties of a connected learning experience is having an environment where members have a shared purpose. A shared purpose provides a foundation for interactions with other members of the community and provides a commonality with people regardless of age, background, or location. It is the link that holds a community together, and it is a context that fuels and supports learning and development. As Ito et al. (2013) explain, “When learning is part of purposeful activity and inquiry, embedded in meaningful social relationships and practices, it is engaging and resilient” (p. 74). A shared purpose can be fostered and supported through collaborative activities (including competitions), leadership that is cross-generational, and collective goals guiding activities or projects (Ito et al. 2013).

*Hogwarts at Ravelry* is more than just a space for members to share their interests in *Harry Potter* and fiber crafting. The group is built around collaborative, interest-driven activities with the shared common goal of building, through narrative and crafting, a fantasy world that parallels that of *Harry Potter* and offers a safe and supportive “home” to its members. The group’s atmosphere, activities, and interactions

are all centered on this common goal. It influences how members define themselves within the group. Members are not just fiber crafters who like *Harry Potter*; they are part of a Hogwarts community and as such they are students of Hogwarts, members of Hogwarts houses, attending Hogwarts classes, and creating and participating in the wizarding elite groups of the Order of the Phoenix and Death Eaters. The group's classes, House Unity Projects, and challenges keep members collaborating, competing, and working toward this shared purpose.

To give a sense of the difference the atmosphere, activities, and shared purpose of this group makes for participants, it may be helpful to contrast *Hogwarts at Ravelry* with other Ravelry groups. Consider a Ravelry group about fiber crafted toys—or *amigurumi*. This group has nearly 7,000 members, but only three threads have been updated with new posts in the past week. Members share pictures and patterns for *amigurumi*, and there are threads dedicated to specific questions and issues. Activity is sparse, though, and mostly centered on answering specific questions or offering comments on what other people have shared. Also consider a group based on the book and movie series *The Hunger Games*. In this group, there are more than 800 members but only a handful of threads have been updated this month, with most of those posts centering on the death of an actor. Most threads are centered on discussions and speculations about the books and movies. Although the group was fairly active in 2012 and even parts of 2013, most of its activity seems to be focused on the initial book clubs and the release of the movies. Finally, consider a beta testing group that has more than 15,000 members and dozens of threads that are updated every *hour*. This group's purpose is to pair pattern authors with testers who will offer feedback on the pattern. Although the group is very active in terms of quantity and frequency of posts, members' posts are task oriented. They may compliment a pattern, but the bulk of the posts are offering specific corrections or asking for clarifications. Rarely do members chat with each other within a thread, and they do not seem to feel any camaraderie with other testers or even with the author for whom they are testing a pattern. Once a test is done, the author and testers all go their separate ways.

Compare these groups—one centered on a particular type of fiber crafting, one centered on a fandom, and one centered on a specific type of partnership—with *Hogwarts at Ravelry*. All four groups have significant populations of members but the activity levels and type are quite different. The activities, challenges, and competitions of *Hogwarts at Ravelry* support and sustain members' engagement with the group, each other, and their interests years after the release of the final *Harry Potter* book and movie. Members may discover the group because of their shared interests, but the activities lead them to compete and collaborate with each other. They form friendships that go far beyond the initial fiber crafting and *Harry Potter* interests. The sense of community permeates nearly all of the threads as members share their projects and discuss their fandom but also engage in activities, trade banter, use role-play to build the fantasy world, and chat about activities, fiber crafting troubles, and daily lives in their discussion areas. Members often trade

private messages or even call or meet locally with each other. There are many other groups on Ravelry in which members are active and deeply engaged with each other and with the group's activities. The shared purpose is what elevates a group from being a space of just shared interests to an active and engaged community.

Some of the ways in which *Hogwarts at Ravelry* builds and fosters its shared purpose is through competitions, challenges, and collaborative activities. Some of the collaborative activities of the group are the House Unity Projects, in which members of a house all craft something related to a theme and then collectively share their projects in the same place at the same time (Pfister 2013). Since the fall of 2011, the House Unity Projects have become an important activity that houses do every class rotation. They build camaraderie between house members and provide an easy and fast way for new and inactive members to participate in the group. New members often feel intimidated when they first join Hogwarts because of the number of activities and their mimicking of "school" assignments, but the House Unity Projects help initiate those new members to the shared purpose of the group of working together, having fun, and building their fantasy world through role-play, narratives, and crafts. Often house discussions collectively create the narrative to post with the projects, helping new members learn how to tie narratives to projects. Furthermore, the House Unity Projects allow members and houses to interact in new ways, encouraging other members to role-play their responses to the bombardment of projects from one house into another area of the group. Past House Unity Projects have included Ravenclaw's setting off fireworks in the Great Hall, Slytherin's "letting loose" snakes into Ravenclaw's common room as a prank, and Hufflepuff's making breakfast items for the headmistress in her office.



*In the first House Unity Project, Ravenclaw set off fireworks in the Great Hall of the group. Image courtesy of the author.*

Another activity is Quidditch, in which members collaborate with their housemates to score points in the magical game against other houses. To compete, students craft items related to the theme of the Quidditch match and share a picture of their crafted items to score points for their team. In May of 2013, the Quidditch theme was "spiffing up your gear" and students had to submit images of the Quidditch gear they had crafted. Over six days, there were 361 posts of students cheering their house on, complimenting projects of other houses, and role-play competing in the Quidditch match. The forum rolled with messages like this one:



of course the second to the Pitch is another Badger.....

**SQUEEE  
EEEE QUIDDITCH!!**

Students submitted items with action narratives:

*... what an amazing match, but that Snitch must be possessed! It's flying all over!  
Under my broom it went, into a bucket of a tar and then into a dark cloud! If it  
weren't for the golden wings I couldn't see it at all!*

My Snitch isn't the cleanest, sorry coach! I'm trying to catch it now. ...

Oh! I caught it with my book!

Like other activities of the group, Quidditch and the House Unity Projects build a sense of shared purpose through collaboration, competition, role-playing, and coauthoring of the fantasy world.

It is not accidental that the activities work so well to build and support the shared purpose of the group; members actively work to keep, create, and prune activities that support connected learning principles and the group's ethos. Later in this report, I detail how the members actively coauthor the organization and activities to support the shared purpose of the group and its rich fantasy world.

## PRODUCTION AND PERFORMANCE

Making is another core property of a connected learning experience. Members join Ravelry because of their interest in fiber crafting, and it is fiber crafting that is at the core of *Hogwarts at Ravelry*. Connected learning recognizes that learning that is hands-on and involves making or production is engaging and resilient. In connected learning environments, this making can take on a material or a digital form (Ito et al. 2013). With *Hogwarts at Ravelry*, we can see how the "made" goods are both material crafted objects as well as digital fictional worlds, and the connected learning environment provides the resources and the abilities to create and circulate these creations.

*Hogwarts at Ravelry* is centered on production in many forms. The community is built around making—through fibers, through words, and through digital tools. Students take natural fibers such as wool and cotton and spin them into a usable yarn. They dye their yarns in Crock-Pots or bowls to create unique color lots. They take their homemade or store-bought yarn and with needles or hooks make a ball of yarn into a sweater, a blanket, socks, or even toys. It is production, in perhaps the lowest-tech and one of the oldest forms possible. But it is also digitally mediated, with the connected learning environment of *Hogwarts at Ravelry* providing the support, guidance, feedback, and resources to make it happen. Within the group, students can find a spinning tutorial thread set up by knitreaver in which she and other spinners of all experience levels share their "how to's," tips, experiences, and favorite resources. In her thread, knitreaver says:



Hello, spinners! I've been seeing some lovely handspun around the castle, and I thought it time that we spinners have our own lounge to chat and learn about spinning. I'm hoping this will be a place to share our experiences and ask questions. I'd like to start a list of links in the header for great learning sites/videos and even fiber vendors. If anyone has recommendations for links, please post them.

Knitreaver, who lives in New Jersey, also has started a thread for students who want to learn to dye yarn, providing links to resources on winding yarn into a ball, dyeing methods, and how to twist dyed yarn into a usable skein.

Even for those who are knowledgeable in a particular fiber craft, participating in the group can be motivating and inspirational to craft more, learn new techniques, and push the crafter to take on more difficult projects. Tori, a 23-year-old from South Carolina, thinks that her participation in Ravelry has really helped her grow as a knitter:

I am in a good number of groups on Ravelry. I definitely think they've been helpful in inspiring me to try new things when it comes to knitting. I've been part of several knit-along and challenge groups (like *Harry Potter* Group and GeeksRUs) whose guidelines for qualifying projects sometimes forced me out of my comfort zone, which was exciting.

Earth, a 21-year-old Raveler, was inspired to learn new techniques after hearing about them from group members and seeing others' completed projects:

I think ravelry is one reason I kept knitting. And there was always a new technique someone was talking about and for awhile, I just kept doing more projects so that I could learn more. Like cables, I was inspired by someone's post or whatever so I was like, "I'll learn that!" and the same with things like entrelac (a type of stitching) and socks.

Pilots began a very large and time-consuming "Beekeeper's Quilt" and made a baby sweater because of the support she found at Hogwarts. The group helped motivate her to continue the project and also supported her endeavors to try new things. "I don't think I ever would have started the Beekeeper's quilt if it hadn't been for *Hogwarts at Ravelry*. And I wouldn't have been as motivated or felt as supported in trying new things like making a baby sweater."

Production is also closely tied to self-expression. As Ito et al. (2013) explain, "These are activities when learning becomes tied to self-expression and identity, supported in a group context" (p. 75). Members of connected learning environments are not just producing according to someone else's plans or instructions. They are choosing what to make and how to make it according to their own interests, desires, and personal tastes. In *Hogwarts at Ravelry*, students are encouraged to creatively imagine or fit their crafted items to a certain assignment or prompt. Fiber crafting often becomes an art form and space of self-expression, with crafters carefully choosing or creating

the yarn and the pattern to craft something uniquely *theirs*. Isabel, a 19-year-old from Canada, expresses her love for self-expression in fiber crafting—not just in items for herself but also in gifts and the messages she can send in the crafted gift:

I also love the final product. Nothing gives me more satisfaction than wearing homemade socks, and being able to flaunt something fabulously unique and perfectly personal. That being said, another facet of my adoration is definitely from the communicability of the art, if that makes sense. I like giving, and crafting plays into that perfectly. People appreciate the thought, effort and love that went into a handmade gift.

Production is integral to the fiber crafting interest that brought members to the group, and it becomes an important part of participating and helping build the fantasy world. Through the community, members find inspiration to try new things and the support and motivation to continue creating. Through this production they learn new things and are able to express themselves in new ways. Members also learn new things about themselves in this production, about what their challenges are, and that they are capable of doing more than they thought. They produce, they learn, and they grow.

## OPENLY NETWORKED

The connected learning framework also points out that learning that crosses multiple settings—such as home, school, and peer culture—is most resilient for youth. Some of the ways in which learning can cross multiple settings are when resources are abundant and accessible across settings, and when there are multiple ways to enter into and connect out from a connected learning environment. Also, learning is supported when achievements, products, and badges are visible across settings (Ito et al. 2013).

In some ways it is easy for *Hogwarts at Ravelry* members' interests to cross many different settings: Fiber crafts are portable and create material goods that are often wearable or giftable. Members wear socks they knit, don hats they crocheted, and give away baby sweaters or mittens as holiday presents. The portability of crocheting and knitting makes it easy for members to bring the activity to other settings. *Hogwarts at Ravelry* members have talked about knitting on the go while in church, school, and even standing in line while they are out doing errands. Isabel, a 19-year-old knitter in Canada, knits while attending college lectures. For Tori, a 23-year-old knitter in South Carolina, her knitting during a theater production led to a discussion with a costumer about historical production:

One of the costumers saw me knitting and started asking me some basic questions. After a few minutes she confessed that she was trying to figure out how to re-create a historical hat for an upcoming show. She gave me the name of the hat style, I did a little research since I was unfamiliar with it, and then gave her some recommendations on what would be the best yarns to use and what technique would create a similar look.

Tori's knitting in a new setting offered an opportunity for her to share her interest with the customer and to learn about historical clothing.

As Tori's experience shows, knitting in public spaces or while doing other activities can expose new people to the interest, strike up conversations around it, and lead to sharing or teaching moments. Some members actually became interested in fiber crafting initially because they saw others doing it in various settings. Thanh, a 20-year-old knitter in Vietnam, first became interested in crochet when she saw somebody doing it in class. Amazedbygrace, a 19-year-old knitter from Canada, became interested in knitting at a sleepover when she was 11 years old because a friend was doing it. Both members were exposed to fiber crafting in unexpected settings that ignited their interest.



*Ravelry allows users to link profiles from different social sites to their Ravelry profile.  
Image from Ravelry.com.*

Fiber crafters also share and connect online, and Ravelry has features that help connect across Ravelry, social media, and online craft stores or sites. Ravelry allows its users to upload their projects, including pictures, which are viewable by all other users, and make them public via a “share this” link at the top of each project page. Because Ravelry functions as a database, it collects and links to patterns across thousands of websites, blogs, and crafting forums. Ravelry also allows members to link their own blog to their Ravelry page, which then streams their entries on their profile and on their group pages—connecting audiences across multiple sites. For members' businesses, Ravelry also allows members to buy and create ads that appear in Ravelry groups.

**frecklegirl**  
Mama Rav

send message  
in my friends

First name	Jessica
Raveler since	April 2007
Online?	no
Website or blog	<a href="http://www.frecklegirl.com/blog">http://www.frecklegirl.com/blog</a>
Flickr ID	frecklegirl
Location	Boston, Massachusetts
Birthday	October 12
Years knitting	4
Years crocheting	Just getting started with crochet- so fun!
Pets? Kids?	Bob, boston terrier
Favorite colors	lime green, dark aqua, dark red, pink (Reeeally don't like most purple except I love dark eggplant)
Fave curse word	crappers

**About me**  
Just a girl with a dog, a sweet husband, a Vespa and way too much yarn.  
Hope you enjoy Ravelry- Cassy, Mary-Heather, Erica and I are working hard to make it great! :)

**Regarding Ravelry messages:**  
I do love getting Ravelry mail but please keep in mind that I get a lot of it and will respond as soon as I am able. ;) If your message is urgent or if you have a Ravelry- related question or concern, please go to the [Contact Us](#) page instead.

Thanks so much!!

72 projects  
166 queued  
37 books  
1840 posts

55 stashed  
174 faves  
2199 friends

permanent record  
Flagged posts 1

frecklegirl's website

featured finished objects

*Ravelry's profile page links into the user's website or blog in both the profile narrative and in a sidebar. Image from Ravelry.com.*

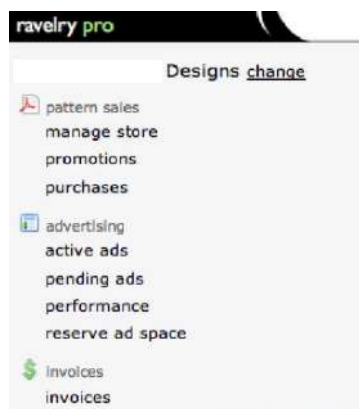
Some *Hogwarts at Ravelry* members use these features to connect interests and communities across different sites. For Jen2291, the ease of sharing patterns and connecting Ravelry to other sites has helped her start to write patterns and share patterns and resources with friends. Although Jen2291 had long been modifying and creating her own patterns, it was only after her friends at *Hogwarts at Ravelry* began encouraging her that she started to write the patterns down. The easy upload system of Ravelry made it easy for her to move those patterns into the database and share with a much larger audience. Jen2291 also began blogging about her crocheting and creating video tutorials for her peers at *Hogwarts at Ravelry*. As she explained:

I had a friend who just didn't understand what I meant ... and she said "I wish you lived closer so I could SEE you do it. lightbulb! And now, I have videos of basic stitches on my blog. My blog is really just a way to share my projects with family and friends that dont use ravelry. lol

She also began using personal blog entries about holiday traditions and recipes in *Hogwarts at Ravelry* challenges. Because Ravelry allows users to link their blogs to their Ravelry profiles, Jen2291 was easily able to bridge between online presence for family and friends and her online crafting presence. Her blog and Ravelry profile helped connect her audiences with her home and crafting interests.

Pattern designers and sellers also find Ravelry's features to be useful in connecting and building audiences for their craft businesses. Briana, a 25-year-old pattern

designer from Utah, for example, uses her Ravelry profile to link to her business pages on the social media sites Facebook and Pinterest, and she links to her online craft stores on Etsy and Craftsy. She also uses Ravelry groups to test her patterns, build audiences, and pursue her nonbusiness interests. The assignments and challenges of *Hogwarts at Ravelry* have offered Briana motivation to craft but have also offered visibility to her pattern designs and the ability to grow her business just through participating in her *Harry Potter* interest. Briana has also bought ad space from Ravelry and used it to advertise her crafting business in Ravelry groups, and she has posted an advertisement in *Hogwarts at Ravelry*.



*Ravelry makes it easy for pattern sellers to reserve their own ad space.  
Image from Ravelry.com.*

As a social media site, Ravelry is part of a much larger ecology on the Internet and just one of many resources that many members use in their fiber crafting, business, and social interests and interactions. Many of Ravelry's features make it easy to connect these resources and communities, and *Hogwarts at Ravelry* members use these features to cross between social networks, build audiences, share resources, and expand their businesses. The materiality of fiber crafting also bridges the online and offline worlds; members wear and craft in school and public spaces, initiating conversations and the trading of resources with others around them. Through these connections of sites online and offline, *Hogwarts at Ravelry* members easily jump across and share resources. Links are made visible, barriers to crossing are low, and members and sites connect.





*Amy's popular hat. Image courtesy of Amy.*

Amy is a 17-year-old, homeschooled, knitting pattern author and designer in Colorado. As an author, Amy has written and published four knitting and two crochet patterns on Ravelry.com. Amy is also a *Harry Potter* fan, and one of her designs was inspired by a hat in the sixth *Harry Potter* movie, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 1*. On Ravelry, more than 1,100 people have added this hat pattern to their “favorites” list, more than 400 people have the pattern in their queue of things to make, and nearly 200 people have already started projects using the pattern. This one pattern has already earned her more success than many pattern authors ever experience.

Like many other fiber crafters, Amy learned to crochet and knit from her family. Her grandmother taught her to crochet as a child, and Amy learned to knit from her sister. It was not until Amy found Ravelry.com, though, that she found a knitting community to support and foster her knitting and design interests.

Before Ravelry, Amy found two websites that had knitting and crochet patterns, but the sites were very limited in the types and number of patterns they had. Amy did not have many friends who knit or crocheted, and her grandmother crocheted hats only for charity. With her resources for knitting and crochet

patterns and advancement fairly limited, Amy began doing some basic designs of things that interested her.

A friend introduced Amy to Ravelry.com, and on the site, Amy found a wealth of patterns. Ravelry offered not just patterns like the other two sites that Amy knew about; it also had tools to organize supplies and a community of people who shared the same interest in fiber crafting. In Ravelry, Amy even found other knitters and crocheters who loved *Harry Potter*.

The community aspect of Ravelry was a big draw for Amy. She knows a few people in person who knit or crochet, but Ravelry opened up an entire community to her. Through the groups, Amy has found a social connection with others who share and support her interest. Amy chats with other fiber crafters about personal life and knitting tools such as yarn ball winders. She even gets to help out other designers with their knitting. Her knitting and crocheting really took off as she was inspired by the projects she saw from other fiber crafters and under the “hot right now” section of Ravelry.

Amy's participation on Ravelry also began influencing her designs. Whereas the previous websites and their limited options pushed Amy to design out of necessity, Ravelry has been inspirational because of its wealth of patterns. Through the pattern database and the works that others are doing, Amy is exposed to a wealth of designs and techniques. Ravelry challenges Amy as a designer to come up with something different and unique. As Amy says, “I have to push myself to design instead of going straight to the patterns tab and finding hundreds of patterns ready to knit or crochet.”

In addition to helping inspire new designs, Ravelry has also helped Amy envision and start to create a business around pattern authoring. Being in a community of fiber crafters exposes Amy to varying levels of professionalization that fiber crafters expect or put into the patterns they author. Amy has put a lot of effort into how her designs should look—not just as products but also as patterns. She is learning about



and acquiring new skills related to pattern authoring, including creating graphics, taking pictures, and formatting the pattern for publishing and sale. Instead of a bare-bones recipe for how to make an item, Amy's patterns includes images, detailed instructions on techniques, and even tips on how to get a finished product to fit and look right.

Amy has only one pattern listed for sale on Ravelry, which allows users to list, sell, and download patterns. She also uses the other design features of Ravelry to help support and expand her business and its audience. Amy hopes to build her audience through her blog, and Ravelry's integration of users' blogs into their profiles helps connect Ravelry audiences to the blogs and other websites of its users.

Amy's dad has been actively supporting Amy's business goals. Together, they have discussed the blogging platform that Amy originally tried and the things they dislike about it. They have looked into getting a WordPress blog for Amy, and Amy's dad has even offered to create a simple site for her to use for her pattern authoring. Here we see both Amy and her dad drawing on their areas of expertise (Amy in fiber crafting and her dad in computer programming) to collaborate in this shared purpose of Amy's designs. The morning of one exchange I had with Amy,

her dad was considering getting her Adobe Illustrator so that she could use the program to create graphics and a logo for her designs and blog.

Amy's dad is also interested in learning to knit, and fiber crafting has actually become a family affair for Amy and her sister. Fiber crafting started as an inter-generational activity between the girls and their grandmother, but now it also spans their parents' generation as the girls have taught their mother to crochet and their dad to knit. Amy and her sister have also taught a few of their friends to crochet, and their crafting motivated another friend to take a knitting class at her school.

Through Amy's experiences and use of Ravelry, we are able to see how the communities and features of the site help support and advance fiber crafters' career interests. Through Ravelry, Amy has found a supportive community with whom she shares an interest. The patterns and businesses of other fiber crafters have also helped Amy advance as a pattern author and designer, and Ravelry's design features allow Amy to sell patterns via the site and also build an audience that connects outside of it. With and through Ravelry, Amy's interests, family, and online community intersect and overlap in ways that have truly broadened her knowledge of and opportunities in fiber crafting.





This section details how the interweaving of connected learning principles in the design of *Hogwarts at Ravelry* fosters full participation within the group and engagement in community events and social action. The first section will explore how members strive to support the group's shared values through activities and organization. The second section will explore how these activities can provide gateway opportunities for community involvement and civic engagement.

### CONNECTED LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS AS BOTTOM-UP, CREATED, AND CHANGING

As explained earlier, *Hogwarts at Ravelry*'s activities and organization are built around supporting the common goals and shared values of the group. These shared values provide a foundation for organizing not just activities, but also the group's organization and rules. Although *Hogwarts at Ravelry* is a part of a larger site, its organization, activities, and common goals are member driven. It is the administrators and members who act as the architects and builders, and they have to deliberately and continuously work to create, prune, and adapt activities to keep the group motivated, active, and true to the shared values that are at the heart of the community. In this section, I will detail how the members of the group work to support the common goals and shared values and how this has been a challenge at times.

A core shared value for *Hogwarts at Ravelry* is to foster a supportive, fun, and collaborative "home" for all members—regardless of their experience, ability, or amount of time to commit to the group. Although the group's activities are centered on a point system and a groupwide competition for the house that has the most points, the real reward is being part of an engaging activity with full participation of the community. It is members' participation that makes the group fun and allows the group to collaboratively build a rich fantasy world of Hogwarts for fiber crafters. Offering a group that fosters this level of full participation, in which the most novice and casual players, as well as the most advanced and committed, are all welcome and challenged in the group, is not easy. One of the major challenges that has faced the community is how to sustain an environment where members are challenged and rewarded for high levels of investment and expertise, while also offering low barriers to entry for members who are less experienced, slower, or have less time to invest. At various points in its history, the group has struggled to maintain this balance.

One of the first times that the group faced this challenge was in defining what counted as an assignment for classes or challenges. Holly, a pattern designer in Maine, has been in the group since its early days, and she described the early collaborative discussions about members' vision of the group and its organization:

Well, those of us who first joined, we all started off with just one big chat room, which ended up being the staff room. And we just kind of bounced ideas back and forth, and that's how we started with the beginner classes. And

in the very start, the classes were much different than they are now. I taught “Care of Magical Creatures” and we actually made the creatures, not something that represented the creature. You had to make something special for the group instead of making what you are doing anyway fit. And that’s when we kind of said, “You know, let’s make this more easy for people to participate.” And we started changing over slowly from there. But, yes, everybody sort of gave their ideas and bounced it back and forth and we went from there.

At the start of the community, members tried to find a group design that balanced their vision of a fiber crafting Hogwarts while also providing a welcoming space for all members—including those who did not have as much time or experience to participate as others. Having a “low floor” for participation, so that there are minimal requirements to be a full participant, is an important element for a connected learning environment. It allows the group to maximize participation and growth from members. At the start of *Hogwarts at Ravelry*, members had to create special *Harry Potter* objects to participate in the activities. These specific items required both a certain amount of extra crafting time as well as a certain level of expertise. Dragons are not necessarily a beginners’ project.



*The original rules of Hogwarts at Ravelry required craft submissions to be replications of items from the Harry Potter universe. Items such as this dragon, though, are difficult for beginners to craft. Image courtesy of the author.*

Through group discussions, members realized that by requiring specific and special projects, they were limiting who was able to participate. By changing the rules for submissions, members could use narrative to tie in what they were already working on rather than making things specifically for the group. Now those who had time only to make items on their existing “to do” lists or those who were just learning to craft and were making basic items could also fully participate in the group. Rather than making a cauldron, members could reimagine a baby hat as a cauldron and tie it into the prompt through storytelling.

Three years after the group was founded, though, it hit another snag. By the summer of

2012, participation in the group had declined: Members participated in fewer activities and with less enthusiasm, and some members were even leaving. In a back-channel discussion, current leaders and long-term *Hogwarts at Ravelry* members discussed the dwindling and lackluster participation, which quickly evolved to trying to identify causes of the problems. Contributors brought up complaints and shared their own perspectives and experiences. Through the discussion, the consensus was that the group was requiring just too much work, time, and energy on the part of participants.

Jen2291 pointed out that the group had up to 25 places for members to post each project, and because members were competing for the House Cup, they felt pressured to post each item in as many places as possible to maximize points. Others chimed in that the quality of posts was also deteriorating; many members seemed to be making “tenuous” ties between the crafted item and the assignment. Another member, Bobbi, admitted she was taking a break from *Hogwarts at Ravelry* because participating was requiring too much work and time. She felt guilt about letting her team down when she was not able to participate as much and so she was taking a break.

The atmosphere of the group had changed from being a fun and supportive group to a place where people felt stressed. There was also a feeling that the “game” was taking a backseat to the points. One member admitted that although she tried to challenge herself to submit each crafted item to only one activity, the missed points were too tempting and she always wound up posting the item everywhere. With the focus on points and the ability of prolific members to earn points on an item up to 25 different times, the difference between those who had the time, energy, and crafting ability to make and post projects to 25 different spots and those who did not was becoming staggering. At the time of the discussion, Slytherin house had 10,000 more points than the next house. Within Ravenclaw, the difference between the most prolific member and a casual member was more than 8,000 points. To put this in perspective, a crocheted hat typically earns about 20 to 30 points.

The balance of the group had become skewed toward the high achievers and less welcoming to novices and those with less time to commit to the group. Jen2291 pointed out that she was receiving more comments that seemed to indicate that casual players might feel as if they did not have a place in the group:

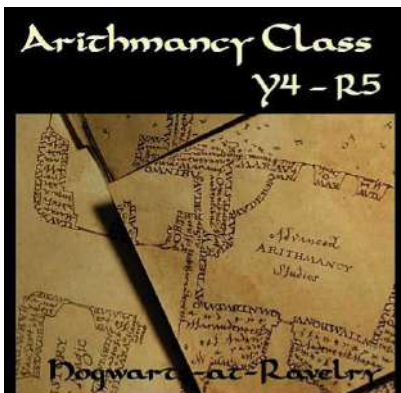
Limiting that would also limit the overachievers to the same number of projects as everyone - making it a bit more even playing field. Perception wise at least? I've had more “Seriously, you did that in two days? Gah!” comments this year than last. ... may mean nothing, may mean the onset of a ‘I can't compete with those people’ mindset.

After identifying these problems, members brainstormed about possible solutions. They began tossing out ideas and building on the ideas of others as to what activities could be cut or combined to decrease the number of options. KnittingPrincipal cheered on the collaborative efforts of members to figure out a solution, saying, “You are all so

brilliant! These are just the thoughts and brainstorming that can really help us make for a more active group (I think!!!!”

Although the members did cut and combine activities, the change that they thought would make the biggest difference was to restructure a core rule of the group. Until now, students could submit one crafted item to as many activities in the group as they wanted. With the change, students could submit a project to only one assignment or activity. This would allow members to have more time and energy to devote to the fewer submissions of projects and in turn would enrich the narrative of the activities and fantasy world of the group. High achievers would still be distinguished because they would be submitting to, and completing, more activities, but the gap between high and low achievers would not be so large.

Prolific members would also be distinguished through the badges that KnittingPrincipal had created. KnittingPrincipal had created badges as a new fun way to reward members for accomplishments and provide something for members to work toward. There was no formal system of badges, but many teachers and administrators offered one set of badges to students who turned in an assignment to a class, and special badges for those who completed all of the class assignments or all of the classes. With the change in rules requiring that each crafted item could be submitted to only one spot, the ability to earn a badge for completing a full class, let alone all classes in a rotation, became a mark of distinction.



*A badge for completing an arithmancy class.  
Image courtesy of Myriam.*

After deciding on the changes in activities and rules, members in the back-channel discussion collaborated on how to introduce and implement the changes to the group. Drawing inspiration from the *Harry Potter* book series, one member pointed out, “You know, since it IS Year Five, if you want to thin things out a bit while still keeping with the plot of the book, Umbridge could come along and shut things down.” At that time, *Hogwarts at Ravelry* was paralleling the fifth *Harry Potter* book: *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. In this book, the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry is invaded by a Ministry of Magic official, Dolores Umbridge, who seeks to take control of the school’s activities.

The headmistress KnittingPrincipal role-played as Dolores Umbridge to swoop in and shut down some activities, change other activities, and change the rules of the group. Most members, unaware of the back-channel discussion about the problems, were at first shocked at the changes but then gleefully embraced them. The resulting changes made perfect sense in regard to the group's paralleling that of the *Harry Potter* series and served only to enrich the fantasy experience of members.

The flexibility to change the group as needed to realize their shared goals has been instrumental in keeping *Hogwarts at Ravelry* popular, active, but also appealing to both highly experienced and highly committed as well as the casual players. The open discussion in and feedback-oriented, peer-driven nature of connected learning environments allow a timely identification of problems and a collaborative approach to solutions in these types of communities.

## CONNECTED LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

One of the surprising aspects from this case study has been the opportunities for community involvement and, sometimes unintentional, civic engagement. In connected learning environments, interest-driven communities often provide opportunities for local community involvement (Ito et al. 2013). Many fiber crafters make items for others or for community outreach projects, such as charities or events. Within *Hogwarts at Ravelry*, many of the official group activities involve members in or reward members for community outreach or civic engagement.

From a Craft Yarn Council (2012) survey of fiber crafters, 49 percent of respondents said they had spent at least some of their time making charitable items, and each of the respondents had participated in an average of 5.5 charitable events in 2011. There are many groups dedicated to providing knit or crocheted goods to various charities, hospitals, and military servicemen and women. There are also groups that donate knit or crocheted items to homeless men and women, foster children, children in third world countries, mothers who have lost a child, displaced animals, and even seafarers.

Knitting or crocheting items for charities is a common activity for *Hogwarts at Ravelry* members. This emphasis on community involvement and charitable giving is woven into the daily activities at *Hogwarts at Ravelry*. The staff has always awarded extra points to any item that is crafted for charity, which not only rewards members for their focus but also provides incentive for other members to craft goods for charities. In class assignments and competitions, members will note when an item is intended for a charity or cause. Pilots, a 21-year-old *Hogwarts at Ravelry* member, makes numerous items for various charities, including blankets and hats for neonatal intensive care unit (NICU) babies and bibs, hats, and items for Marine Corps Kids. When she learned to knit as an adult, her first projects were NICU baby hats: "It's a project that's always been near to my heart though and even now I still really enjoy knitting for babies."



Pilots fits these projects into her *Hogwarts at Ravelry* assignments: Headbands made for Marine Corps Kids become hair accessories for the Patil girls of *Harry Potter*; burp cloths become magical potions; and NICU baby blanket squares become squares of Ron Weasley's blanket. As part of one class assignment, Pilots wrote a summary for a book about Hurricane Katrina and included a hat she had made for a NICU as her crafted item for the assignment.

Crafting: Many crafters sent items to Katrina after the hurricane. This hat could have easily been one of them. Warm items are important after any natural disaster when people have limited temperature control and have lost many of their possessions. This hat will be going to the NICU.



*A hat that Pilots made for a NICU baby and her tie-in of the hat to the assignment, for which she summarized a book about Hurricane Katrina. Image courtesy of Pilots.*

Charitable activities are also a formal activity for the group at *Hogwarts at Ravelry*. In 2011, the St. Mungo Society (SMS) was created as a way to specially honor those who are particularly active in creating charity items or involved in charity causes. The SMS honored particularly charitable members, and members could submit nominations for the SMS. Those who were inducted into the SMS were given a badge and congratulated in the SMS thread.

In 2013, after one long-term member lost her husband to cancer, the group placed a much larger emphasis on a collaborative charity activity for the group. The St. Mungo Society has grown from honoring charitable members to becoming a formal activity that points to J. K. Rowling's charities (Rowling 2013) as an inspiration and value for the group to follow. SMS now actively encourages members to participate in charities and has become a gateway through which members are exposed to and craft for charities. KnittingPrincipal describes the goal of SMS and also gives a nod to J. K. Rowling's emphasis on charities:

The focus of the St. Mungo Society will be very proactive this year ... each rotation, I will be highlighting a US charity and a charity from somewhere else in our world ... my hope is that you will all consider donating each rotation to one of these charities. Think of that - if even 50 of us each donated to one charity, all 9 terms ... 450 people/groups would benefit from just our crafting!

In addition, I will be spotlighting the charities that J.K. Rowling supports ... Our beloved *Harry Potter* author has made a tremendous difference in the world - not only through her beautiful writing, but through her generosity and determination to make the world a better place ... for witches AND Muggles! :)

In the two class rotations of 2013, the St. Mungo Society featured the “Mile of Mice” charity, a UK charity that will auction off mice for the Alzheimer Society; Wool-aid, an international charity that collects wool items for children living in some of the coldest climates of the world; and a cancer care center in Maine, for whom *Hogwarts at Ravelry* hopes to send at least 500 hats for cancer treatment patients.

## CONNECTED LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS AS GATEWAYS FOR SOCIAL ACTION

As Ito et al. (2013) point out, the collaborative activities of interest-driven communities can also provide gateway opportunities for members to engage in social action. In June of 2012, several *Hogwarts at Ravelry* members teamed up with other *Harry Potter* fans across Ravelry to create *Team Harry Potter* and join the 2012 Ravelympic Games. The Ravelympic Games began in 2008 as an Olympic craft-along for one group on Ravelry and quickly grew to become a sitewide activity. More than 12,000 Ravelers participated in 2012. The Ravelympic Games engage Ravelers in the Olympics by appealing to their fiber crafting interests and the existing communities of Ravelry. Ravelers are invited to create and join teams, craft as they watch the Olympic Games, and compete in Olympic-inspired activities such as Baby Dressage, Charity Rowing, and a Sweater Triathlon. For many Ravelers, the Ravelympic Games are a reason to keep up with the Olympic events. It is an activity to do with friends, a way to meet new people who share their fiber crafting interests, and a motivation to overcome personal obstacles and learn new techniques, while simultaneously cheering on their country’s athletes in the Olympic Games.

The design of the Ravelympic Games provides another example of the civic orientation of the community. In addition, the Games became an unexpected catalyst for political mobilization (Pfister 2012). During the 2012 Ravelympic Games, the U.S. Olympic Committee (USOC) issued a cease and desist order over the use of “-lympics” in the name Ravelympics (Macur 2012). This cease and desist letter to Ravelry prompted the craft-along to become a space of discussion and social action against the USOC.

The cease and desist letter from the USOC said that the use of the word “-lympics” was trademark infringement. The letter went on to say, “We believe using the name ‘Ravelympics’ for a competition that involves an afghan marathon, scarf hockey and sweater triathlon, among others, tends to denigrate the true nature of the Olympic Games,” and that, “In a sense, it is disrespectful to our country’s finest athletes and fails to recognize or appreciate their hard work” (Casey 2012). The letter was posted in the Ravelympic Games group, causing a flurry of angry reactions, including discussion of the legalities of trademark, the language used in the letter and the cultural valuations



of different hobbies, and calls for social action against the USOC. Within 24 hours, there were more than 2,200 posts in just one thread regarding the cease and desist letter.

The craft-along group became a space of discussion about trademarks and the legalities of the complaint. When one Raveler asked how a project featuring the Olympic Rings could be targeted, another Raveler answered that projects that included the logo were protected by Fair Use. Another Raveler argued that Ravelry did not fit the trademark infringement argument because Ravelympics was not a commercial event. Another Raveler pointed to the larger issue of trademarking a term such as “-lympics” and that it was “scary stuff” that the Supreme Court allowed this.

Ravelers were also upset about the language used regarding their interests. Ravthletes were upset at being told they were “denigrating” the meaning of the Olympics. Furthermore, many Ravelers reacted in anger at what they saw as the USOC’s disregard for the effort, time, creativity, and expense they put into their crafted goods. Some of these items were given to others or even donated to charities, deployed soldiers, and premature babies. Of the 46,989 projects finished for the 2012 Games, 3,185 projects were completed for charities.

It was also frustrating to some Ravelers that the USOC was disrespecting crafts that had previously been included as Olympic events in the early 1900s. Even though they were no longer included in the games, fiber craft artists were still using fiber crafts to create massive works of public art in honor of the Olympic Games (BBC 2011; Kramer 2004; Wrenn 2012).

Ravelers also called for action against the USOC and the Olympic sponsors. Some promised to boycott the Olympic Games, write to their cable providers, or refuse to patronize any of the Olympic sponsors. Ravelers encouraged each other to write to the USOC, post on the USOC’s Facebook page, and contact journalists. And they did. One person posted that the emails to the USOC were bouncing back, indicating that Ravelers had shut down the USOC’s email account. Ravelers posted on the USOC’s Facebook page, Twitter, the USOC website, and even had a knit-in at its headquarters (Macur 2012). Ravelers took to their own blogs and social media. The Crochet Liberation Front, a group dedicated to supporting crocheters, wrote its own letter of protest against the USOC (Wheeler 2012). The controversy was featured in the *New York Times*, *NPR*, *USA Today*, *Gawker*, and *The Washington Post*.

The leader of *Team Harry Potter* and of *Hogwarts at Ravelry*, KnittingPrincipal, channeled her frustration into creativity, and, using Dr. Seuss’s *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas*, created a short parody about the author of the original letter sent to Ravelry. She posted the parody in *Hogwarts at Ravelry*, not all of whom were participating in Ravelympics or previously aware of the dispute. Her posting alerted members of the controversy and the actions of other Ravelers against the USOC. A short excerpt of her parody:

*But,  
Whatever the reason,  
His heart or his head,  
He stood there on Olympics Eve, hating the Ravens,  
Staring down from his cave with a sour, OC frown  
At the warm lighted windows below in their town.  
For he knew every Raveler, all across the wide world,  
Was busy now, readying sticks, yarn, and hooks.  
“And they’re picking out patterns!” he snarled with a sneer.  
“Patterns that might say ‘Olympics’ ... oh dear!”*

Within 24 hours, the USOC issued two apologies to the Ravelry community but still required that it change the event’s name (Sandusky 2012). One of the moderators of Ravelry remarked that she could not help but “stand back in awe at the collective power of Ravelry” at eliciting such a quick apology.

For many Ravelers, the fiery response to the USOC’s letter was not because of its request for a name change. While a letter asking for a name change would have surely elicited discussion about ownership of the term “-lympics” and the financial side of the Olympics, it is unlikely that it would have resulted in the protests, anger, and level of upset that the USOC’s letter created. Rather, the USOC’s letter insulted Ravelers’ interests and failed to recognize what the Ravelympics event does to celebrate the Olympics and its athletes.

The USOC’s letter mobilized an interest-driven community into a force of action. The Ravelers participating in Ravelympics were there because they shared a passion for fiber crafting; they did not join to discuss trademark or engage in social action against the USOC. Yet we are able to see through the cease and desist letter how a participatory culture can be mobilized for social action. Knitters took to Twitter, Facebook, and email. One knitter staged a knit-in at the USOC headquarters. Knitters shut down the USOC’s email within hours of the letter’s being posted. Knitters contacted their local news sources. The controversy garnered national attention through major news networks and numerous blogs. The connected learning model recognizes the potential for such interest-based groups to provide opportunities for collective action and more political engagement (Ito et al. 2013), and the Ravelympics/Ravellenics controversy demonstrates how this can happen even in communities that are not typically politically focused.

## THANH

## Knitting in Vietnam



Thanh is a 20-year-old knitter in Vietnam. Although Thanh's mom used to sell yarn and even knows how to crochet, there is not a strong local fiber crafting community where Thanh lives. While most of the knitters I interviewed received positive responses to their knitting from nonknitting friends, Thanh's local friends make fun of her for knitting and joke that she is a "grandma in the making." Although Thanh feels "miffed" about their teasing, she also makes light of it by saying that her grandmother does not knit at all.

Thanh attributes the lack of a local fiber crafting scene to the tropical weather and culture of her community. She thinks that older generations are too busy raising kids, doing chores, and taking care of their elders to take up any extra crafts. There are few local stores that sell fiber crafting supplies, no local knitting groups, and Thanh points out that she is too "young" for her culture to participate in them if they did exist. She thinks that fiber crafting and the DIY movement are on the rise with her generation, but for now she finds community online.

At the end of her freshman year of college, Thanh and her mom took a trip to Da Lat, a town in the highlands where cold weather and knit items were in abundance. Thanh's "interest was spiked," and she bought knitting kits and turned to Google to help her learn to knit. Online, Thanh found knitting guides and YouTube videos. After learning some of the basics of knitting, Thanh created a Tumblr account for her knitting interests and people kept mentioning a site called Ravelry.

Through Ravelry, Thanh found a community of people who shared her knitting interests. Her favorite group is a knitting challenge group, in which members sign up for a challenge and are then assigned (by the administrators) a challenge project based on their existing projects. Although Thanh was not excited about the project she made for the challenge, she loved doing it as part of a group and learning something new. As she said, "I've done one challenge and although I don't really like the final product, I do feel

included in something communal, and that I successfully conquered a challenge."

Thanh is also a member of *Hogwarts at Ravelry*. She mostly just watches the group's activities, but she really enjoys looking through members' completed projects and their project pages. Looking through others' projects has inspired and motivated Thanh to learn more techniques and improve her knitting: "I learned mainly via jealousy XD [emoticon for joking] Just kidding. I mean, looking at others' projects, especially those with intarsia, fair isle, entrelac, complicated cabling, or nupps, is enough to push myself to learn more."

Before Ravelry, Thanh's only experience with lace knitting was a scarf that involved two basic stitches. After joining Ravelry, though, Thanh found and started a new lace project that involved a new stitch called slip-slip-knit (ssk). Learning this stitch made it easy to learn many related stitches and increase the types of patterns she could take on, and she also discovered, through someone's project comments, an even easier method of doing the ssk stitch. When Thanh took on a complicated shawl pattern that had many errors, she was able to look through the pattern's project pages to find others who had solved the pattern errors and could help her alter the pattern. She also really enjoys reading stories about projects that people write in their project pages.

Through Ravelry, Thanh was able to find a knitting community that she does not have locally. While she uses other online resources, such as YouTube and knitting sites to learn stitches, it is the project pages and challenges of her Ravelry groups that inspire her to want to learn those techniques. Because of the groups on Ravelry, including *Hogwarts at Ravelry*, she has learned many new techniques, has taken on an alteration of a pattern, and even participated in the Ravellenic Games. Despite her lack of resources locally, Thanh's fiber crafting interests have even moved offline; she hopes to one day move to Japan on a fiber/textile scholarship or open a yarn store.

# CONCLUSION



This case study has offered insight into a networked fiber crafting community that is female dominated and low-tech in its focus. *Hogwarts at Ravelry* combines the interests of fiber crafting and *Harry Potter* using narrative, crafting, and role-playing to create a fantasy fiber crafting and magical school that is full of rich activities, challenges, collaborations, and opportunities. The activities foster members' interests, challenge members to try new things or learn new skills, and are production-driven through narratives and crafted items. The group's organization provides a formal system of support through its house system and informally through its atmosphere, in which members offer resources, compliments, and advice in discussion rooms, activities, and in "how-to" threads. The group also provides opportunities—through activities, challenges, and rewards—for members to engage with their local communities, civic causes and events, and even moments of political engagement. *Hogwarts at Ravelry* uses its activities and the features of its parent site, Ravelry, to encourage members to interweave their real-life interests, online resources, and social networks in support of their interests. Finally, the group strives for and works to create this connected learning environment, reassessing, adding, and pruning its activities and organization as needed to continue offering a space where members of all experience levels—from the newest or most casual crafters, to the most advanced crafters and designers—feel supported, safe to pursue their interests, and encouraged to advance.

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