It's the making, not the marking, that counts ...

Jill Margerison and Andrew Stark
The Southport School, Queensland Australia

Introduction

The IBSC Action Research Project on Maker Culture complements current innovative pedagogical developments at The Southport School where *interactive and collaborative* Learning Management Systems are extending traditional educational spaces.

In implementing this project we became 'architects' of a blended learning project identifying how 'space' could be most effectively used to encourage *creativity*, motivation and engagement. The project encouraged boys to create a response to the literary classic *Lord of the Flies.*

We hypothesised that the students would enjoy the vibe of the Makerspaces we designed, as much as the Making itself. Our professional reading supported this hypothesis, particularly the claim that *participatory culture develops affinity*, belonging and membership to either a virtual or physical learning community. (Gee 2004)

The Research Question

How can affinity spaces enhance creativity in Grade 8 boys?

Whilst our question involved understanding how Making contributed to boys' *engagement with texts*, we hypothesised that students achieve more and have greater engagement with their studies when they '*connect*' with the spaces in which they work.

Research Context

Founded in 1901, The Southport School is an Anglican day and boarding school from Reception to Grade 12. One of the learning and teaching strategic priorities of the School focuses on the embodiment of positive psychology as a means of creating a mindful and flourishing community.

Participants

We involved a mixed ability class of 13 year-old boys. Known as 8B, the class totalled 24 students. The decision to work with Grade 8 was two-fold. Firstly, the curriculum in the Middle Years program is a more flexible one. Secondly, opportunities to enrich literacy through extension reading projects are seen as a welcome addition to the program.

The Research Action

Action in the classroom involved activities that resulted in the production of art, poetry, models and LEGO play. Students also moved between different activities and venues; including *online spaces*. Here students created online communities where they discussed the novel and their Maker projects. The end result of this action was a range of products that were both teacher and independent directed. The 'action' was conducted over approximately 10 weeks with one lesson each week dedicated to Making.

Data Collection

Data collection techniques included surveys, camera interviews, direct observations, photographs, journal entries and discussion forums on Mahara and Moodle, a closed Facebook site and Year 8 blogging site.

Data Analysis

- The online and face-to-face dialogue between students, student groups and teaching staff was analysed as part of this project. This approach contributed to the further development of a participatory culture and included separating the data into three different categories: collaboration, initiative and engagement.
- Collaboration developed and explored the notions of autonomous learning, experiential learning and problem-solving. This aspect included all the students and staff involved in the project.
- Initiative was highlighted as a result of the boys' 'affinity' with the spaces in which they were working. We experimented with different spaces for different activities.
- Engagement became evident as students progressed through the various phases of their maker projects. There was a high level of completion and students readily discussed and reflected on the 'constructionist' process.

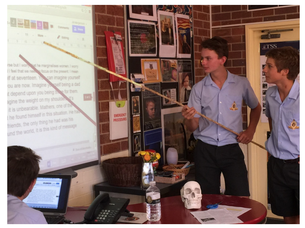
Key Findings and Discussion

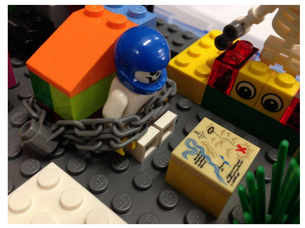
The 'hands-on' activities sparked opportunities for conversation. Making meaning of the text with Lego produced positive and incisive discussion relating to key themes in the novel. Students discussed online and face-to-face what they were going to create and the process involved.

Autonomy was appreciated. Sam commented that "communication is a big factor" and "technology has allowed for greater opportunities to communicate with peers over a project."

Tony reflected "there is no right or wrong; no standard for creativity" and being able to respond to a text imaginatively "allowed for personal expression."

As students began to engage with the project they initiated their own online project discussion forums ahead of the teacher. 'Affinity' with the project and each other led to this initiative. In a sense, positive 'affinity' contributed to a certain level of online 'risk-taking' and students felt that they could assume the 'role of teacher'.





Conclusions

Making things – "Let me produce and create, and I learn"

The Maker mindset offered opportunities for us to examine the community spaces within which we work. In particular, we wanted to understand more deeply how to motivate teenage boys to engage with learning at both an individual and a group level. We connected *engagement with learning* to a hypothesis on the importance of building 'affinity spaces' – or positive learning communities – where boys could tinker, make and create both online and face-to-face.

In undertaking this project, it became clear that:

- a blend of *digital and traditional* learning spaces can create a variety of opportunities for dynamic conversations, collaboration and creativity to flourish
- Facilitating positive *affinity spaces* can generate greater propensity for students to be creative and take risks with their learning
- That Making can encourage the *sharing of ideas*. This was a significant contributor to developing feelings of belonging and nurturing identity
- Encouraging *micro-networks* of like-minded people contributed to healthy team building across the School as a whole.

'It's the making, not the marking, that counts'

Key Readings

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Further Information

This poster and further information is available at http://www.theibsc.org/

Researchers' emails: jill.margerison@tss.qld.edu.au
ajs@tss.qld.edu.au