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 hypothesized that the students would enjoy the vibe of the Makerspaces we designed, as much as the Making itself. Our professional readings 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 hypothesized 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, 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, we hypothesized that students achieve more and have greater engagement with their studies when they ‘connect’ with the spaces in which they work.

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 ‘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’.

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.

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Conclusions
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.

Key Readings

Further Information
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