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How did your space become what is it, what kind of curriculum or mission do you have, and what projects do you do with your students?

The basic idea is it's a social action makerspace. I believe that making has to be based on curriculum or content. It can't just be based on STEAM related stuff that is highly engaging but doesn't really have a foundation in content areas they are working through in their normal coursework. This was a chance to get my students to become social activists. There's so much going on in their world. They are experiencing so much trauma. We feed from the local homeless shelter and the domestic violence shelter- nearly 50% of our students are considered homeless. I wanted them to tackle some of those personal issues but then look beyond them and see some of the issues that are affecting their lives and also at a larger scale- the global community. So it began with them blogging, which was maybe 7 years ago. I used to be the school librarian by the way. It was all centered around me. They sort of talked about a specific issue, we talked about blood diamonds, and I asked them to do blog entries and it usually was accompanied by 1 or 2 videos for them to watch or maybe a serious game. But once I had accumulated a very large number of issues, and I began thinking about how this can be blown up into something more student-centered, I began to let them choose a social issue we had gone over to create a project, but I had a limited number of tools that I was using at that point. But those started to develop too, they were mostly digital tools at first. I did a "go animate" thing where they would type it in and the characters would say it. Or they would do some iMovie stuff. Scratch would be another thing that I would use. But after a while, I really started thinking about the power of student choice and passion-based learning, and I began opening up the social issues that they could choose and really making Techbrarian, my site, into more of a high-interest curation site, where they could explore their own social issues that they cared about. I began to think of my space as more of a makerspace around 3 years ago. That's when we started doing woodworking, jewelry and leather crafting, and Arduino and LilyPad, getting more serious about programming and game design, and really bringing the social activism portion into it. Not just learning about social issues but beginning to do something about it. It started with a group of kids who wanted to do blessing bags. And then the technology was they had begun doing video podcasts about these issues and that sort of what lead up to doing blessing bags. We filmed it. There was something super special about showing those videos to other students, and it started to dawn on me that the best way to create real momentum, and be social activists, is to have a feedback loop, where I would show their projects, which would motivate students to create more projects like that. I began to have a page where I featured all of their blog entries and started creating movies more actively, at least 3 or 4 large scale ones, or just showing images of their work or featuring them in my mini lesson. My space around 2 years ago began to become a little more structured. I would talk at the beginning of class for about 5 to 15 minutes and then they would go at their projects. Sometimes I would just go over a tool alone, but most of the time it would just be presenting a social issues and then trying to draw out project ideas- brainstorming with them, and then doing the "just in time" teaching instead of "just in case" when it came to the tools. I would teach them how to edit a movie if that was what they were working on, rather than teaching everyone as a group how to edit a movie. That became my approach that I still utilize. The difference with this year is I began making a journal September on where I formalized what the lesson was going to be that day, provided the links. It was a shared journal- it was me talking about what I was thinking about and what was affecting

me but also it was them to be able to travel the links themselves on their own time or during my class time. I'm going to be doing it again next year, it was really successful. I guess what's evolving is the more artistic element of it. This year we got a pottery wheel, they started doing clay work, we did fold forming with metal where you basically are forging metal and burning metal. It's a combination of folding and hammering and texture and opening up. The one really nice project was a heart made out of that and they wrote something about love and equality. All the art projects have to evolve around a social issue, so another use of the metal was Jackie was presenting at Emoticon, where middle and high school students come together once a year and present their projects- it's also a competition- about change making in their world. It's definitely on the making end of scales if not just on the real high-tech focus. A lot of inventions, things like that. We were talking about technology addiction. She created a phone out of clay, and then created a hand. Then they created cuffs- everything was hand-crafted, they soldered together chains. So the phone was connected to the wrist like a shackle. That's one part of what's evolving.

I like how you brought up the whole curriculum based idea. That's the real evolution, that's the bigger idea that I talked about in my article. If you're not going to have a guiding curriculum like social action or activism, then your makerspace should be connected to the humanities curriculum or STEAM curriculum at your school. You should be collaborating with your school directly and the makerspace should be a large scale tool for the classroom curricula that flows through each classroom. I just finished a grant, we started on Wednesday and was due Friday night and it was just straight writing for 3 days and just did it. It was called Curriculum Aligned Makerspace and it was for the district. They would pilot it at my school where I collaborate with 5 different teachers... and they come down to my space in order to manifest the themes. The kids will draw out different themes and tools using the makerspace approach but aligned with the curriculum correctly, their scope and sequence. That is what I believe the next generation of school makerspaces need to evolve to. It's not about kits, it's not about high engagement. It's like candy. You give it to them, it feels great at the time, but there's no long term nutrition to it. It's not feeding their minds in a long term sense. To complete a kit or attach a Makey Makey to a banana, that's nice, but what are they really getting out of it. How is it connected to their world. How is it changing, in a deep way, their creative problem solving abilities. How is it making them agents of change where they're really innovators, they're not just manifesting a few of the affordances provided by the kit. It shouldn't be where they are taking a lego robotics kit and making an elephant out of it. It should be that they're studying elephant ivory and as a result they want to create a Lego stop motion with a robot that gets its tusks taken off. Then we follow the tusks like where it gets sold, and into the Asian market or whatever. The point is that should be where the making comes in play. It should be organically arrived from the starting of the content and the solutions come into play after that. So that's my basic philosophy.

How do you get the kids interested in these issues and attached to them? With some of the more controversial issues, what kind of reactions do you get from your students?

As a librarian, the reason why I can call myself a techbrarian, just like a librarian, you develop an expertise on curation. Your job is to find, as a librarian, the most high engagement books that are going to get them excited about reading. You know your audience, you know children, you know literature, and there's a playful element, and a childlike element to the way you approach finding things. You have to get excited yourself, and put yourself in their position, and look for color and excitement and movies in the mind and all that stuff. It's the same thing with these links. I refuse to put something up that didn't engage me and my daughter and made me laugh. I'm just not going to do it. So as part of that they're going to be very often really as you say "controversial" but also age appropriate for a teenager. They're going to see this stuff no matter

what. Sex and cursing and violence and all that stuff is so prevalent. I'm not showing them something they haven't already seen. I'm showing them a version of it that will help them become invested in a social issue. That's part 1, really finding truly engaging resources and that's taken years and years. Go onto my sight, I challenge you to find something boring, and if you do tell me because the closest to boring is the infographics. I use a lot of infographics because I don't want them to be there sitting and reading. For a lot of them that's a barrier to become engaged with an issue. So if you provide them with pictures or statistics, that will get you where you need to go. So that's how I get them engaged. I think a lot of that is the art of teaching. It's opening yourself up and being brave and really confronting them and talking real talk, not sugar coating everything. I'm not sure if you should include this part in your thesis but, some of it has to do with the lack of parent involvement. If I was at a "she-she" private school I think I would be a little bit more cautious with my approach because I know that there is a delicate sensibility with what their parents want their kids to see. The truth is they're going to see all of that stuff anyway. I did when I was a kid and I grew up in an upper middle class setting but the way the parents work it would be that way. I think I would be a little more cautious.

An obstacle we have is time. I assume you have these kids regularly throughout the week. Being able to produce something over time that really dives deep into an issue is the goal, so that you are not just grazing the surface of an issue.

It's really hard to get kids to explore this process short term unless you have them for a summer camp. To get regular attendance or do a long-term project would be best.

How often do you have your students?

It ranges between 2 and 5 times a week.

Does everyone work around the same issue or do you individualize them?

No. That's part of the approach. It's all about permutations. No two people will use the same tool or same social issue. 5 people might be doing homelessness, but they may be doing it in 5 different ways with 5 different tools. Some people may choose to do songs but they may choose to do them about 5 different issues. It requires a lot of management and experience to do that balance. You also need a lot of help. In the grant I wrote in a paraprofessional to work at my school.

What is the timeline of a project?

A day to 5 months. As long as they're engaged and working hard each day, I don't even care if they finish.

Could you give me some specific examples of social issues that come up very often?

There are so many issues that we went over this year. If you go on my journal you'll see. I guess you're asking which are most attractive to my students to take on. LGBTQ+, NRA, I fell deeply into the idea of our politicians being bought...