

Makerspaces at Lunchtime in the Library

By Joy Whiteside

The library at lunchtime has always been a popular place, and mostly, students have busied themselves. They have enjoyed access to the computers, completed homework, worked together on school related projects and tasks, played games, accessed the collection and borrowed resources, or sat quietly reading. Library team members are always available to assist and actively engage with students in the space, as required. The library has always been a comfortable, inviting, and happy place.

Learning and making connections

Late in 2013, I began researching the topic of Makerspaces in preparation for writing the Bookmarks page for the SLAV journal *FYI* (Whiteside, 2014). As always, the research work, and the collation and synthesis of articles, provided valuable professional learning for me. Mostly, the resources featured the emergence of Makerspaces in public libraries, but I was inspired to explore how this creative, collaborative concept could be applied to the school library setting. The students in our library at lunchtime usually occupied themselves well, but the Makerspaces research invited me to think that there could be opportunities for offering more creative experiences. The Makerspaces articles focussed on giving students the opportunity to work together; building, creating, and making. In particular, I noticed and reflected on the language in the articles such as 'collaborate,' 'create,' 'community,' 'contribute,' 'innovative' and 'reinventing'.



Building a castle.

Makerspaces are being introduced into libraries of all types (Bagley, 2012). Writers express their excitement about the opportunity and potential of this creative, rather than consumer, use of space. In a blog article about Makerspaces, Judy O'Connell (2012) asks "Ever watched a kid get so excited about something new? That sparkle in the eye and that 'let me at it' urgency that we'd like to capture in every learning interaction?". O'Connell explains that this excitement was what she felt in response to learning about Makerspaces. We have also seen this excitement on the faces of students as we invite them to be involved in some of the new projects and experiences offered in our libraries. Similarly, library team members have shared this excitement.



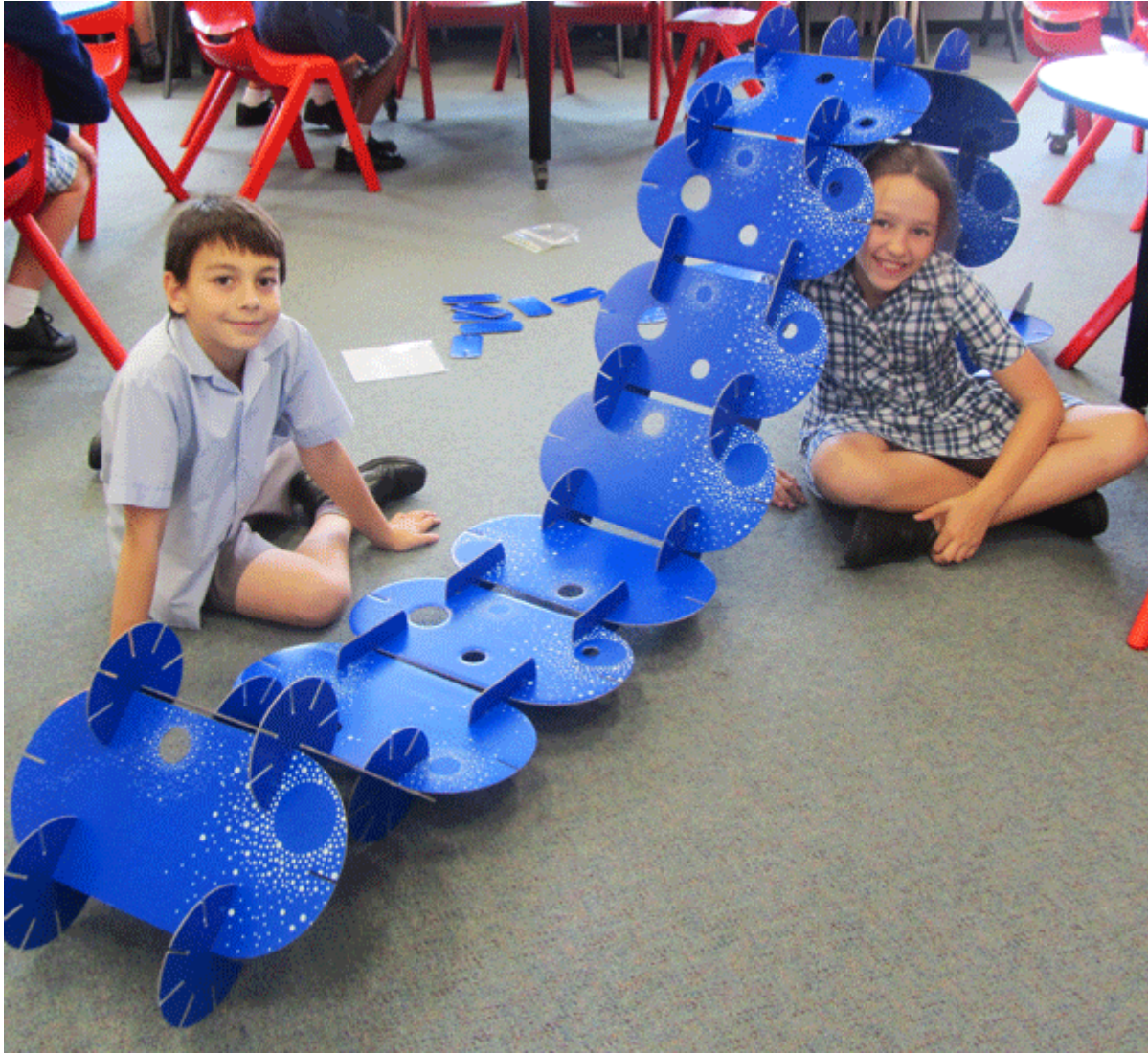
Citiblocs.

A research article about the emergence of Makerspaces in public libraries (Slatter and Howard, 2013) explored the notion of the changing needs of users and the role of the library to provide spaces in which users can create, rather than consume. Slatter and Howard note that a benefit of Makerspaces is the connection with community and increased community engagement. We have also noticed that the activities are a catalyst for engagement and connection. Whereas some students may have come into the library space in a detached kind of way, they are more purposeful and focused on what is happening and how they can make a contribution. There were other students who came to the library regularly who were only interested in playing specific repetitive computer games. We have been able to harness this interest in computer games and rechannel it by inviting the students to be involved in a Minecraft challenge on the library iPads instead. As identified by Slatter and Howard, the students are now creating and building rather than consuming, and they are sharing their learning and creations with others in a community of learners, rather than playing repetitive computer games in isolation.

Sharing learning and responding

It was at a library team meeting early in the year that I shared my learning about Makerspaces. Team members were immediately inspired by the ideas. We discussed the readings and identified the needs and concerns that we had, and what we had noticed about the student behaviour in our libraries at lunchtime. While many students were purposeful, some students came to the library wanting to be in the space but not knowing what to do, and as previously mentioned, some of the students were using the computers in a way

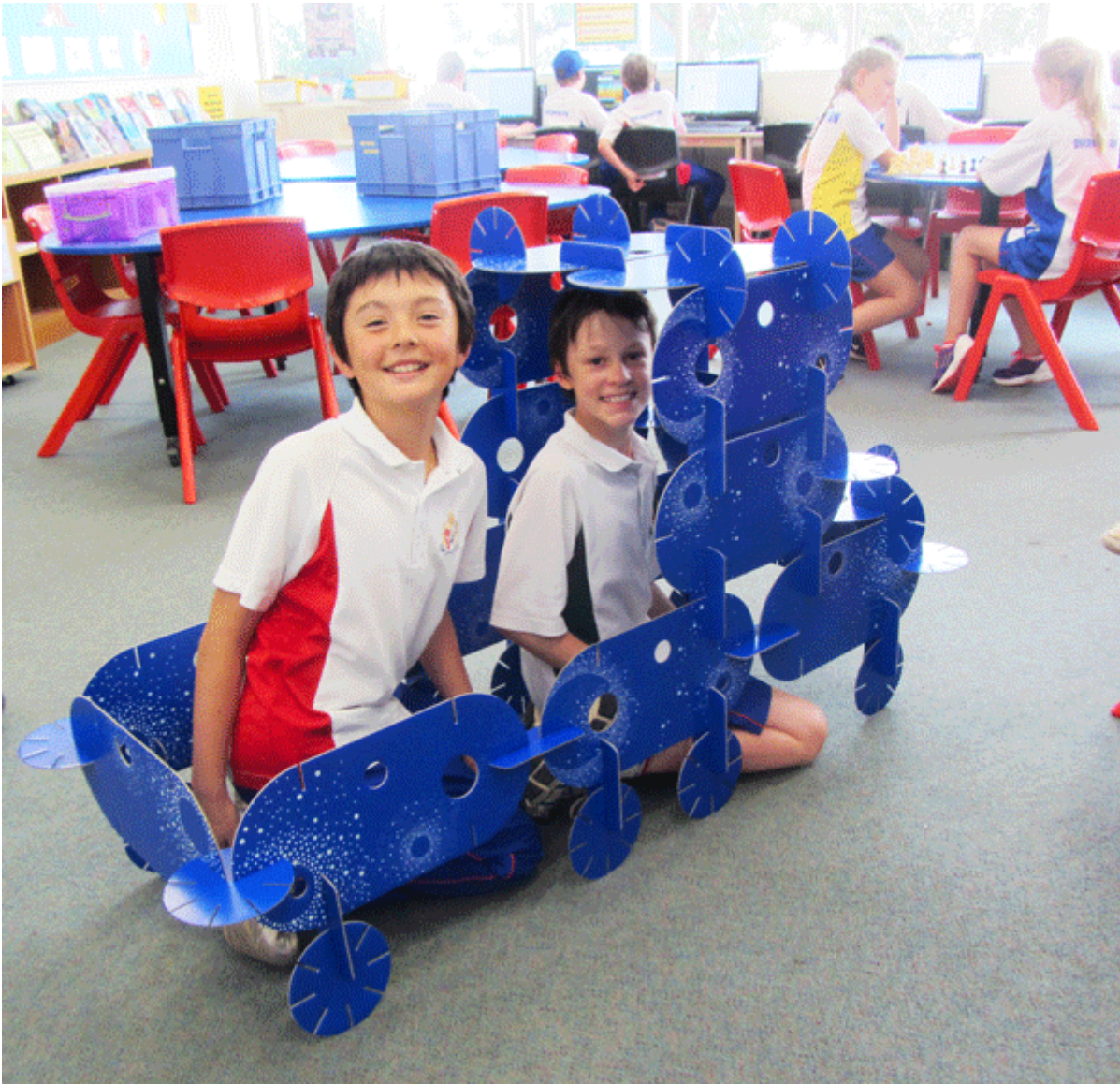
that had become habitual. We were excited by the idea of introducing Makerspaces and wanted to explore this proposition of our libraries meeting the needs of students who were less engaged and purposeful.



Ryan and Anabelle.

Having identified a need for Makerspaces we listed the resources that we required and planned for implementation. We discussed the introduction of a program that would enable learning experiences that were collaborative, creative and innovative. Students would still be welcome to use the library for their own purposes, but the Makerspaces approach would engage the students that we identified as needing direction. We introduced the activities to students in proactive ways by approaching individuals or groups of students, and inviting them to participate in the various activities. We also promoted the activities in assembly.

The resources have been organised in easy to access tubs. Students can help themselves to activities and are asked to pack them away when they are finished. We have tubs of blocks, construction materials, craft materials, paper, cards and stationery, origami books and paper. We use the iPads for students to play Minecraft and use the guided access facility on the iPads to restrict the students to this game. The students can construct their own world, or be involved in a group challenge, such as constructing a castle. Some of the activities have specifically appointed leaders, and some activities have a staff member facilitating.



Mon Petit Art Habitude Voyageur.

Britton (2012) states that the list of equipment and materials will naturally grow as specific projects and programs generate new needs. This has been our experience. To begin with we thought that we would include a collection of Lego and we sought donations from the community. The donations didn't eventuate, and we were able to locate other building blocks that the students love to use. These Citiblocs, offer an exciting and engaging point of difference to Lego and this is part of the attraction for the students. The large number of blocks in the collection means that a number of students can be involved with this activity.

Sharing my learning with colleagues has enabled the introduction of resources that encourage new ways of using the library space and new ways of learning.



Mon Petit Art Minicubes.

Makerspaces – what we have noticed

Learning more about Makerspaces became an opportunity for change. As a team we could see that there was an opportunity to provide resources so that students could be creators rather than consumers. The activities have encouraged and enabled students to collaborate, discuss and problem solve. The provision of resources and facilitation of activities has promoted team work and provided an opportunity for students to cooperate and depend on each other. Together the students have created or built something that they could not have constructed alone. Some activities also foster leadership skills, and give students the opportunity to lead a group learning a new skill such as origami. Students demonstrate enthusiasm and are more purposeful.

Some students still come to the library not knowing what to do, but they very quickly become engaged in making and creating, in sharing and leading, and in conversations and collaborative play.

References

Bagley, C (2012) 'What is a Makerspace? Creativity in the Library' in *ALA TechSource*, Accessed at: <http://www.alatechsource.org/blog/2012/12/what-is-a-makerspace-creativity-in-the-library.html>.

Britton, L (2012) 'The Digital Shift: The Makings of Makerspaces: Part 1: Space for Creation, Not Just Consumption' Accessed at: <http://www.thedigitalshift.com/2012/10/public-services/the-makings-of-makerspaces-part-1-space-for-creation-not-just-consumption/>.

O'Connell, J. (2012) 'Hackerspaces and Makerspaces: The Zen of Innovation' in *Hey Jude: Learning in an online World*, Accessed at: <http://judyconnell.com/2012/04/27/hackerspaces-and-makerspaces-the-zen-of-innovation/>.

Slatter, D. and Howard, Z. (2013) 'A Place to Make, Hack, and Learn: Makerspaces in Australian Public Libraries' in *The Australian Library Journal*, DOI Accessed at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00049670.2013.853335>.

Whiteside, J (2014) 'Professional Learning and Reading about Makerspaces' in *FYI*, Volume 18, Number 1, Summer 2014.

Joy Whiteside is the Head of Library, Keilor Campus at Overnewton Anglican Community College and the manager of the SLAV website.