

Literacy Practices of Experienced Makers: Tools for Understanding Landscapes of Possibilities

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Abstract

In this study, we explore the STEM literacy practices of experienced makers as they engage in a variety of making activities. Literacies are the ways in which individuals navigate, use, and make sense of representational texts within various contexts and for a variety of purposes. Descriptions of experienced makers' practices using representational texts can inform the ways in which educators support young people's literacy practices in formal and informal learning spaces. We interviewed 14 experienced makers—those proficient with certain tools, materials, and techniques for design and fabrication—about their making processes, and we focus our analysis on a particular literacy practice we call identifying, organizing, and integrating (IOI) information. We argue that this practice is enacted within particular making activities—e.g., ideating, tinkering—in certain ways with the purpose of sourcing and navigating information related to the maker's chosen problem. Our ultimate goal is to demonstrate how STEM literacy practices, like IOI, can serve as bridges between the meaningful work of maker-based learning in informal spaces and the curricular demands in schools, so we may broaden participation and, thus, increase equity in maker-based learning experiences.

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