The Open University

Maker culture

Learning by making

Maker culture encourages people to learn together as they construct and create items. The emphasis is on experimenting, innovating, and testing out theories by making things. This is a playful approach to learning. It encourages learners to risk being wrong, and to learn from their mistakes. Feedback is provided through immediate testing, personal reflection, and feedback from people working on the same or similar projects. It is an approach that works well for practical and creative subjects but also develops skills that can be applied in any area of learning.

Maker culture can be used to create new ways into topics that make them more alive and relevant to students. It draws on successful models of learning that are used in the workplace and in everyday life.

Maker culture emphasises the production of things that solve a need in their makers' daily lives. This might be a practical need; it might also be a creative need. Examples of maker culture during the Covid-19 pandemic include the development of breathing equipment and face masks. Creative responses include home-made reproductions of works of art.

Makers produce things through a creative process that emphasises immediate feedback, a process that often includes rapid development, and the testing and building of lots of different versions. They ask for feedback from peers throughout the process, and shared creation is seen as highly valuable. Makers are encouraged to push their skills to their limits, and to explore novel solutions and production methods. Mistakes and failures are regarded as positive learning outcomes that offer opportunities for personal reflection and skills development.

Maker culture encourages novel applications of technologies. It also encourages people to explore links between areas and ways of working that are usually thought of as separate, including a variety of creative and practical subjects.

Maker culture at a distance

Ask students to identify and share problems that they might be able to work on together to create solutions.	These could range from the local, 'How can we run a birthday party during lockdown?' to the wider scale, 'Can we produce some of the protective equipment that is needed worldwide?'
Support students to identify resources they can access and skills they can share.	Skills can be shared via video, discussion, or documents. Family members may have skills, ideas or resources to contribute. Adult learners may be able to link with online communities – younger students will need guidance on online safety.
Students work in groups to plan, to prototype, and to provide feedback.	Groups can communicate via text discussion, phone calls, or live video links.
Students present their solutions to the class and reflect on how they could apply or build on them.	Presentation can be via poster, video or live demonstration, with the whole class joining discussion about what should happen next.

How did it go?

Let us know in the comments on the website www.open.ac.uk/blogs/innovating how maker culture worked for you and your students. Please share any tips that others would find useful, or link to examples.