FOSTERING INCLUSIVITY

Spaces for Making

How do we, can we, make 'spaces for making' inclusive?

How can inclusive relationships foster meaningful making?

What makes one feel welcomed into or excluded from a particular space serving a particular community of learners?

Can makerspaces feel inherently exclusive for students who are not in a particular disciplinary field or who do not look like everyone now using the spaces?

We began with these questions about inclusivity. We are aware that spaces for learning influence relationships and interactions and wondered how thinking about scaffolding relationships in spaces for making would foster inclusivity. We thought about the various users of the space and how they might interact.

The Venn diagram on our poster suggests that everyone can be included in a space and that there can be relationships within and beyond a space. But are they really inclusive relationships?

We considered the idea of meaningful making, which for us implies making in a context in which a multitude of relationships and interactions are allowed and fostered. This is when we began to put some frameworks around spaces for making that promote inclusiveness.
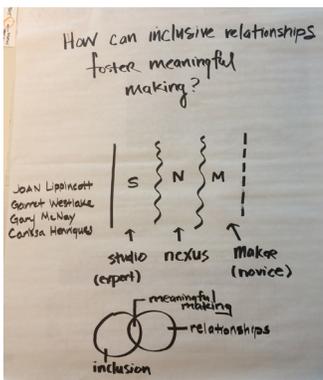
The inclusivity of spaces relates to both users and uses. Greater diversity of tools for making—from yarn, needles, and sewing machines to larger 3-D printers—encourages a greater inclusivity of users.

Spaces identified with certain names (studio or innovation center) or that are located at the nexus of traffic patterns rather than sequestered away in a STEM building are more likely to signal a welcoming space.

Windows into the spaces further promote inclusivity and become windows into a new world of possibilities, spaces where various users can see themselves engaged in a different kind of learning. We thought about the scaffolding of different uses of the space, irrespective of gender, ability, race, or discipline. We keep coming back to the notion of spaces for mentoring, spaces in which different kinds of interactions can happen and relationships can be nourished—peer to peer as well faculty to student.

Makerspaces in libraries are models of inclusive spaces for making. They are open to anyone. There is available expertise, including of student staffers who reflect the diversity of the campus. For beginners, this is a welcoming space in which to join the on-campus community makers.

It is also important to consider what's decorating the walls and how power dynamics within these spaces play out.