

Jan
2026

CRAFT Newsletter

The CRAFT Network Newsletter is a space for sharing what we're learning, making, and wondering together. We welcome submissions from network members—research spotlights, reading resources, calls for collaboration, and responses to pressing questions about equity in and through making.



This issue shares work from our Boston-area network and the San Francisco Bay Area hub as part of CRAFT's ongoing move toward a constellation of locally rooted communities.

Member Spotlight

Shaping Spaces for Learning & Connection

Marie Jimenez

design-forward practices into the school's broader programming. A self-described "serial hobbyist," Marie is drawn to maker education for its blend of collaboration, play, and possibility—spaces where teams can dream expansively and build what they imagine.

meaningful together, she crafted a collaborative making experience inspired by the form of a balancing sculpture.

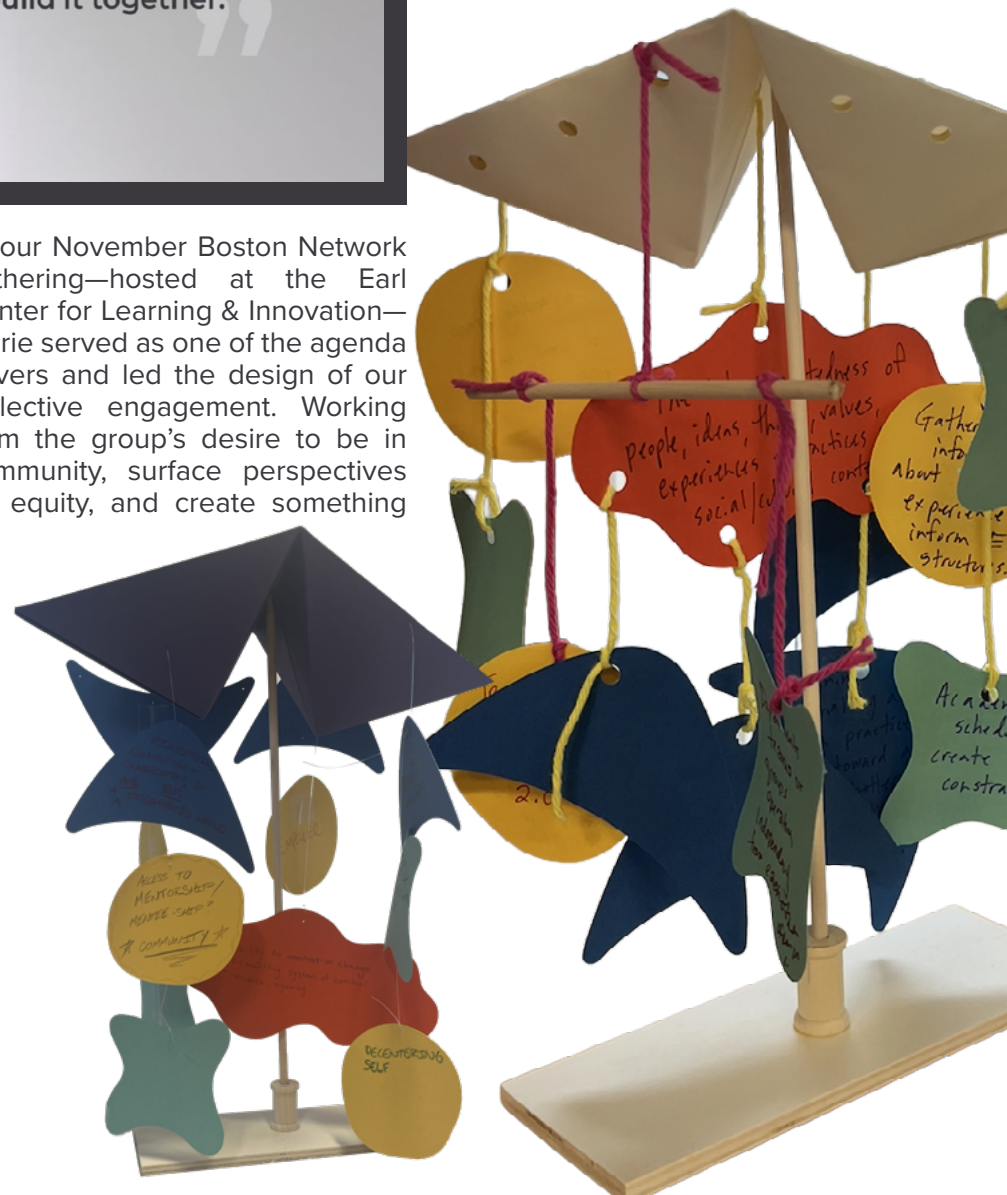
Marie's activity invited participants to transform layered paper shapes into delicate mobiles that embodied our collective reflections on the equity dimensions generated at previous gatherings. The making process became both a shared conversation and a shared creation—an embodiment of Marie's belief that making can anchor dialogue, deepen connection, and help move ideas into form.

I'm drawn to maker education because it lets us imagine what's possible—then build it together.

Marie Jimenez brings a deeply relational, design-driven approach to her work as a doctoral student in Educational Studies at Boston University Wheelock. Grounded in commitments to place-based and experiential learning, her scholarship explores how both schools and informal learning environments can become more humanizing—spaces where curiosity, agency, and community are central to the learning experience.

At our November Boston Network gathering—hosted at the Earl Center for Learning & Innovation—Marie served as one of the agenda drivers and led the design of our collective engagement. Working from the group's desire to be in community, surface perspectives on equity, and create something

Before beginning her doctoral studies, Marie served as the Makerspace Director at Thayer Academy Middle School, where she co-founded and co-chaired the IDEA (Innovate, Design, & Explore Arts) Department. In that role, she worked to disrupt traditional disciplinary silos by convening an interdisciplinary team dedicated to strengthening STEAM literacy across the faculty and integrating creative,



Boston Network Update

November 2025

This November, the Boston group kicked off the new academic year with our first gathering—organized by our agenda drivers, Eli Tucker-Raymond (Associate Research Professor, BU Wheelock) and Marie Jimenez (PhD student, BU Wheelock)—hosted at BU Wheelock's Earl Center for Learning & Innovation. About 17 participants joined us, with many others expressing interest but sure to join future gatherings. It was a grounding and energizing return to our shared exploration of what equity looks like in our varied learning and community spaces.

Building on the equity dimensions raised at our January 2025 meeting—Relationality & Reciprocity, Multiplicity, Community, Access & Support, Power, and Skills + Infrastructure—we worked in small teams to revisit these ideas through conversation and collaborative making. Each group selected one dimension to explore, reflecting on moments of progress, the tensions that remain, and the futures we hope to realize.

To bring these conversations into form, teams engaged in a playful making challenge: crafting balancing sculptures from layered paper shapes, each one delicately poised on the tip of a single dowel. The pieces became both meditations and gentle reminders of the cooperative, interdependent work of pursuing equity together.



We look forward to seeing you!

About Local Hubs

CRAFT is growing toward a constellation of local hubs. This issue highlights work from the Boston-area community as part of that broader, networked vision.

Share Your Work

Exploring making, equity, relationality, or community-based learning? We'd love to hear what you're up to. [Let us know!](#)

Expanding Teacher Practice Through Making, Play, and Community

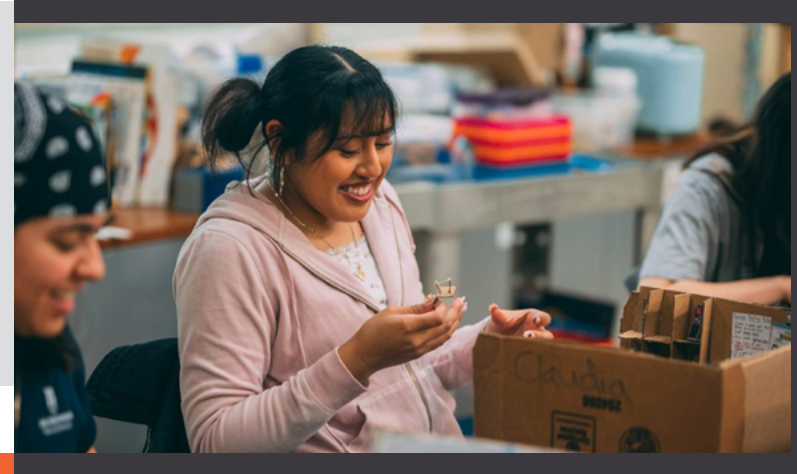
At UNC Greensboro, making and play are reshaping teacher learning. Dr. Sara Porter's course and Will Fisher's Cardboard Robot Parade illustrate how hands-on making supports intentional design, creative risks, and classrooms where belonging grows.

The Cardboard Robot Parade: Making Joy, Community, and Everlasting Memories

Will Fisher, an educator at UNC Greensboro who prepares future teachers through making, play, and joyful experimentation, has spent the past decade nurturing a creative culture that radiates well beyond his classroom. His approach grows from a belief many of us share: when learners are given room to explore, tinker, fail, rebuild, and try again, creativity becomes a practice everyone can access—not a rare trait reserved for a few. In his courses, undergraduates reconnect with their own artistic and inventive instincts so they can bring that spirit forward into their future teaching.

One of the clearest expressions of this ethos is the Cardboard Robot Parade—a community celebration that Will and his students build from the ground up each year. Cardboard scraps become an entire world of imaginative possibility: robots, wearable sculptures, kinetic creatures, and interactive forms, all shaped, tested, painted, and repaired alongside children and families. With the next Cardboard Robot Parade coming up on 4/11/26, learn more [here](#).

Stills from the “Cardboard Robot Parade” documentary by Will Fisher and students, video by David Lee Row, University Communications / Green Star (as featured on YouTube).



Humanizing Pedagogies in Action: Making-Centered Teaching

Dr. Sara Porter, associate professor of STEM education at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, prepares future elementary teachers to think critically and creatively about the classrooms they will someday lead. Her course, TED 345: Humanizing Pedagogies, pairs a weekly teaching internship with a seminar that asks students to examine their own histories as learners and analyze the learning environments they now observe. Through this reflective practice, students begin to understand how classroom design, culture, and structure shape the experiences of children—academically, socially, and emotionally. A centerpiece of the course is the Model Classroom Project, in which each student designs and constructs a prototype of their future classroom using cardboard or virtual reality software. This partnership-based effort—developed with the SELF Design Studio makerspace and the Department of Information, Library, and Research Sciences—invites students to turn their developing pedagogical commitments into concrete, spatial decisions. As reported by the university, students grapple with questions such as: What should I put in my future classroom? How should students face one another?

What colors support calm, collaboration, or creativity?

Dr. Porter emphasizes that design is inseparable from culture. Seating arrangements, signage, the emotional climate conveyed through color, and the placement of the teacher's desk all communicate what a classroom values. Many students choose U-shaped seating to promote interaction; others create calming corners, incorporate mood-tracking systems, or display posters designed to reflect students' identities and foster belonging. These design choices emerge from students' research and their lived experiences in their internship classrooms.

At the end of the semester, students publicly present their classroom models, explaining the pedagogical rationale behind each decision. This culminating showcase highlights the depth of thought students bring to their designs and reflects Porter's belief that learning becomes more concrete when students construct visible representations of their thinking. “When students can



build something that reflects how they're thinking, and when they can see it out in front of them, it really solidifies their learning,” Dr. Porter explains.

Through this course, Dr. Porter positions preservice teachers as designers of humane, research-informed learning spaces, capable of imagining classrooms where children collaborate, feel safe, experience autonomy, and are supported as whole learners. Her work demonstrates the power of making not as a technical skill, but as a pathway to humanizing pedagogy.

For more photos and the full story about Sara Porter's Humanizing Pedagogies course and how UNGC student teachers are designing future classrooms, read [the original article](#) online at the UNC Greensboro news site.

Photos from “UNCG Student Teachers Build Their Future Classrooms,” story by Janet Imrick and photography by Sean Norona, University Communications, UNC Greensboro.



CRAFT at ISAM 2025

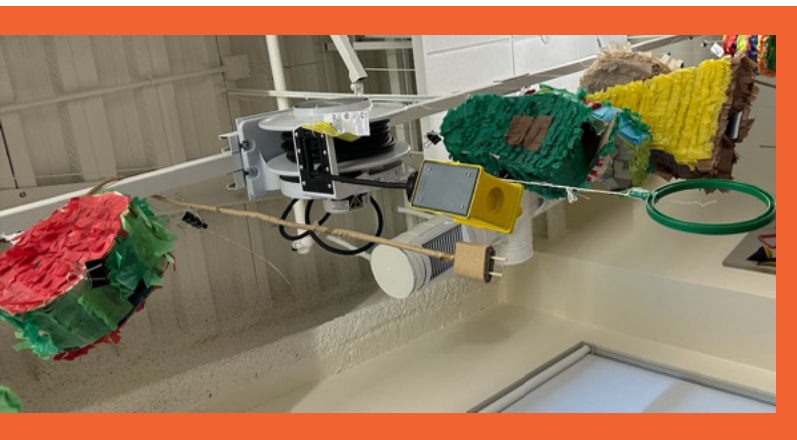
Relationality Built through CRAFT Partnerships: Sustaining a Maker and Equity Research Coordination Network

San Francisco Bay Area CRAFT Network members, Jill Castek (University of Arizona), Nico Janik (WestEd), and Olivia Cornfield (Bay Area Discovery Museum) presented their work at the 2025 International Symposium on Academic Makerspaces (ISAM), held in Berkeley, California. Here, they share key concepts and insights from their conference presentation, offering a window into how their research reflects and extends shared commitments to equity, relationality, and making as a connective practice.

Theme 1: Broadening Participation Across the Maker and Maker Education Community

The CRAFT gatherings brought together a uniquely diverse group of participants, including higher education faculty, classroom teachers, education researchers, local nonprofit leaders, library professionals, professional learning coaches, and individuals engaged in making as part of their personal or professional lives. Participation varied across sessions; not everyone attended every meeting, and each gathering featured a slightly different mix of voices. While some participants were able to join in-person sessions, others engaged primarily online, making the format accessible and inclusive and responsive to participants schedules.

Figure 1. Natural material collages displayed on the ceiling



Despite the changing makeup of attendees, there was a strong sense of continuity in the community's shared values and the intentional design of each meeting. Participants contributed conceptual frameworks and critical inquiry to help make sense of patterns across contexts.

Figure 2. Settings that sparked connections



Others offered perspectives shaped by community engagement, professional development, informal learning spaces, and personal or professional experiences with making, all of which deepened the dialogue and expanded the group's collective understanding. At times, friends or family members of attendees also joined and added their own perspectives. For example, one participant's husband, a mechanical engineer who develops the infrastructure for hospitals, shared his professional experiences and enriched the conversation, further broadening the community's understanding of making across contexts. Sessions were hosted by community members at a range of locations, including makerspaces in schools from early elementary through college settings. Community maker spaces and universities were also settings for gatherings.

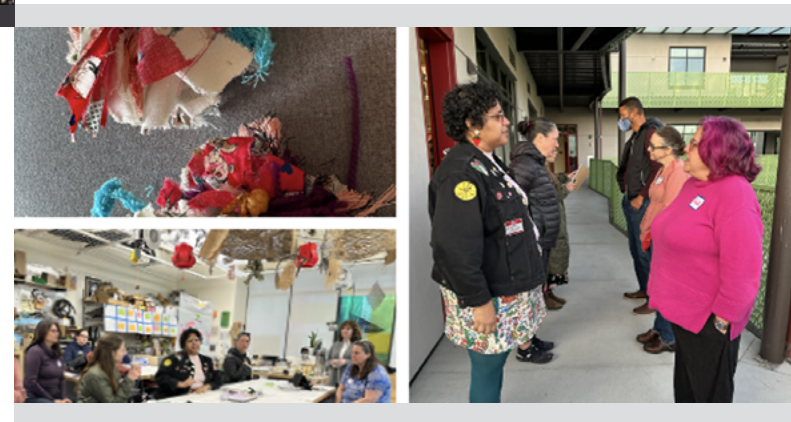
Hosting a gathering allowed the host to talk about their space and goals. For example, the host for gathering #2 designed a discussion where she showed her use

Theme 2: Building Relationships and Belonging

Research relationships evolved over time through critical conversations, sharing of experiences, and reflections on personal stories. The nature of the gatherings encouraged personal connections but were also structured to address the goals the group set out to accomplish. Across the gatherings, participants were invited to get to know one another personally, and to get to know each other's work in various ways, and through multiple discussion formats. For example, making activities were facilitated as a way to bring out opportunities for supporting one another and connecting in ways that dovetailed with self-expression. In gathering one, participants engaged in the simple exercise of finger knitting while in meeting three, participants created pom poms that encouraged reflection on their own making values. Conversations occurred in the process of learning-by-doing, engaging the hands and the creative process, which appeared to create a greater openness as well as a sense of joy, fun, and safe risk-taking. The finger knitting activity, in particular, led to open conversations between participants about how we teach, and how we learn new things in a community.

When asked what created a sense of belonging, participants suggested that belonging was encouraged by activities that: 1) encouraged the cross-pollination of ideas, 2) made the most of the diverse make-up of community discussion, and that 3) recognized the value of

Figure 3. Creative interactions sparked belonging



community and authentic connections, and 4) encouragement of practices that support learning together to work toward common goals.

The gatherings included documentation in terms of shared and individual notetaking. Facilitators worked

with a group of voluntary agenda drivers to create discussion seeds. Across the first two meetings these discussion seeds were gathered, brought to planning meetings, and iterated on. Five buckets of collaborative ideas for future work were generated. These five buckets addressed topics that participants had conversations around with the intention of working forward collectively with others. The five buckets reflected shared priorities including:

- *Bucket 1: Sustaining the Network. Continuing collaborative work, taking action on ideas, and finding new connections*
- *Bucket 2: Resources and Grants. Locating funders, foundations, and networks, and partnerships for grants.*
- *Bucket 3: Pedagogy and Ongoing Professional Learning. Evolving and sharing instructional practices.*
- *Bucket 4: Making as Resistance. Creating opportunities to reclaim legacies of making across intergenerational spaces.*
- *Bucket 5: Maker Educator Capacity Building. Finding ways to grow and demonstrate impacts through collaboration.*

By seeding discussions through the lens of making progress on shared priorities, energy was focused on next steps that were actionable in future meetings. The buckets served to anchor working groups, providing enough definition to have group work be productive, but also with enough freedom to develop ideas to synergize. Topics reflected shared priorities that were relevant to the direction of the group.

Theme 3: Sustaining Networking and Connections

The CRAFT network offered more than just a series of meetings; it became a shared space for individuals committed to maker education to connect, reflect, and co-create. Participants consistently expressed how meaningful it was to come together not only across roles, but across purpose. Whether they were educators, researchers, nonprofit leaders, or practitioners, there was a deep collective recognition of the urgency and potential of this work. People saw the network as an investment in both personal growth and the broader advancement of equitable maker education. For many, participation in CRAFT supported their professional development and helped surface assets including knowledge, tools, and relationships that could be brought back to serve their own communities. The diversity of backgrounds and contexts of the community meant that participants became open to acting in a learner, collaborator, and a teacher/facilitator role. Participants were able to share and apply things they were already doing, or to seed new ideas they were

trying to figure out in making across contexts. For example, one participant hosts a summer program for youth makers, creating opportunities to make artifacts and sell them as a form of entrepreneurship. Coming together in community with other makers and maker-educators seeded new opportunities to advertise to communities and learners.

At the heart of the CRAFT experience was a shared belief that making is not only about hands-on creation, but also about cultivating a world in which people have the tools, experiences, and opportunities to imagine and build better futures. This belief bound the group together and gave the meetings energy and momentum. Conversations were guided less by technical planning and more by values such as equity, inclusion, learner wellbeing, and justice. From the beginning, participants brought heart-centered commitments to the space.

The CRAFT gatherings provided a rare opportunity to step outside of institutional silos and explore big ideas communally. There was a palpable sense of collective drive, rooted in a desire to rethink and reimagine what learning can look like. People came not with answers, but with questions about how to support their students more meaningfully, how to strengthen community connections, and how to use the maker movement as a lever for transformation. It was not just a professional network, but a space of shared visioning. Gathering to eat, think, and create became a practice, an act of imagining what might be possible if we approached making education as a community endeavor.

At the last scheduled gathering, there was a continued commitment from all the participants to work forward together into the future. Volunteers stepped up to create an organizing team to plan and organize future meetups once a month with rotating leadership.

Ultimately, the value of CRAFT and its sustained presence presents a capacity to foster both personal inspiration and collective infrastructure. It offered a framework through which participants could build connections that extended beyond meetings and into their daily work. By centering equity, imagination, and joy, the network laid the groundwork for a community of practice dedicated to expanding playful learning experiences for all learners and to ensuring that these opportunities are not a privilege for a few, but a right for everyone.

Conclusion

CRAFT gatherings supported connectedness and addressed equity-oriented learning-through-making. This work demonstrates efforts that elevate the work of all partners across communities, cultures, and learning contexts.

While sustaining a network across multiple participants and contexts presents challenges in terms of time, coordination, and scalable ideas, participation can be particularly beneficial when time in discussion sustains relationships and seeds interpersonal connections as well as good ideas.

Additional perspectives emerged that illustrate how this community was valued by its participants.

1. *Equity was central to the people who showed up in a way that it became central to all the work, from the way agendas were planned collaboratively, to the projects we committed to moving forward, to the work that we shared from our own contexts.*
2. *Participation across many “silos” led to deep and productive conversations. The cross-pollination led to innovative solutions.*
3. *The commitment to the value of education and the belief that makerspaces afford unique opportunities to support every student, especially those that might be traditionally left out of some spaces and activities, including students learning English, and students with learning differences gave the group an authentic and important mission in their work.*

References

- [1] Castek, J., Schira Hagerman, M., and Woodard, R. (Eds). (2019). Principles for Equity-centered design of STEAM learning-through-making. Tucson: University of Arizona. Retrieved from <https://circlcenter.org/events/synthesis-design-workshops>
- [2] Oguilve, V., Wen, W., Bowen, E., Abourehab, Y., Bermudez, A., Gaxiola, E. & Castek, J. (2021). Community Making: An Expansive View of Curriculum. *Journal of Curriculum Studies Research*, 3(1), 69-100. <https://doi.org/10.46303/jcsr.2021.8>
- [3] Olivares, M. & Tucker-Raymond, E. (2020). Critical relationality: A justice-oriented approach to education and education research. Medium. Retrieved February 23, 2021 https://medium.com/@mariaco_87227/critical-relationality-a-justice-oriented-approach-to-education-and-education-research-8bf911c381b4.
- [4] Tucker-Raymond, E., & Gravel, B. E. (2019). *STEM Literacies in Makerspaces: Implications for Learning, Teaching, and Research*. Routledge.
- [5] Calabrese Barton, A., & Tan, E. (2018). *STEM-rich maker learning: Designing for equity with youth of color*. Teachers College Press.
- [6] Paris, D., & Winn, M. T. (2014). Preface: To humanize research. *Humanizing research: Decolonizing qualitative inquiry with youth and communities*, xiii-xx.
- [7] Delve, Ho, L., & Limpaecher, A. (2023). Collaborative Thematic Analysis in Qualitative Research <https://delvetool.com/blog/collaborative-thematic-analysis>
- [8] Braun V., Clarke V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative research in sport, exercise and health*, 11(4), 589–597. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676x.2019.1628806>
- [9] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). Thematic analysis. In H. Cooper (Ed.), *APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology*, Vol. 2 (pp. 57-71). American Psychological Association.
- [10] Conroy, MM. Manfield, B., Irwin, E., Jaquet, G., Hitzhusen, G. and Brooks, J. (2024). Six dimensions of sustainability: a framework for organizing diverse university sustainability curricula at The Ohio State University, *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, Vol. 25 No. 9, pp. 316-332. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSHE-08-2023-0344>
- [11] Tan, E., & Calabrese Barton, A. (2018). Towards Critical Justice: Decolonization & Reinhabitation in STEM-rich making with youth from non-dominant communities. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 51(1), 48-61.

EMERGENT QUESTIONS ON POWER, PRACTICE, AND AI

Across research-related materials in education—from journal articles to grant proposals and graduate applications—a clear pattern emerges: generative AI is often promoted as inherently beneficial, with little examination of its assumptions or consequences. Many accounts presume large language models will naturally improve learning, overlooking their technical limitations, environmental costs, and the narrow pedagogical vision they encode—one that individualizes learning, reduces teaching to transmission, and normalizes surveillance. Yet machine learning has long been a useful tool for understanding complex phenomena, and generative AI may hold potential for scaling empirically grounded practices in dynamic, maker-centered environments. This tension raises several questions:



In what ways might generative AI meaningfully support equitable learning in maker-spaces?



How can it assist learners/educators to engage in humanizing activity; help test or model complex design ideas; generate project components that extend what learners can currently create on their own?



What uses make this technology worth exploring in maker-centered learning environments? What are the tradeoffs?

We invite you to [contribute a blog entry](#) sparked by these questions. Whether you write from classroom practice, community partnerships, research, or design work, your perspective can help expand our collective understanding of how generative AI is shaping—and being shaped by—maker-centered educational practice and research. As this technology rapidly evolves, your insights are vital for guiding thoughtful, equity-centered, and environmentally responsible approaches in our field.

These questions were submitted by **Dr. Nathan Holbert, Associate Professor of Communication, Media, and Learning Technology Design at Teachers College, Columbia University**. He designs and studies playful computational tools and environments that help children tinker, build, and make sense of personally meaningful ideas.

Letter from **the PI team**

Dear CRAFT Network members and friends,

As the CRAFT Network continues to grow, we're inspired by the many ways people across the network are building, studying, and reimagining making as a relational, justice-oriented practice. This issue reflects a network in motion—one that is increasingly shaped by locally rooted communities, cross-site collaborations, and shared commitments to equity, care, and creative possibility.

CRAFT exists to bring researchers, educators, and practitioners into conversation around timely and consequential questions about making cultures and practices—particularly as they intersect with power, inequity, justice, and minoritized communities, peoples, and ways of knowing. We are especially excited to be learning alongside scholars and practitioners whose work colors and constitutes what counts as making, whose methods foreground relationality, and whose designs open new possibilities for teaching, learning, living, and thriving—together .

We see the newsletter as one small but meaningful way to make this collective work visible—to share what we're learning, surface emerging ideas, and invite new connections. It is an open invitation: if you're exploring questions about equity and making, designing new practices, convening local communities, or experimenting with creative forms of inquiry, we would love to learn from you.

Thank you for being part of this growing constellation of people and projects. We're grateful for the care, imagination, and generosity you bring to this network, and we look forward to what we will continue to build together.

In solidarity,

Eli Tucker-Raymond (Boston University), Maria Olivares (Boston University), Jill Castek (University of Arizona), Edna Tan (University of North Carolina Greensboro), Cynthia Graville (Saint Louis University)



This material is based on work supported by the National Science Foundation Award #2005898. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.