

Towards Better Understanding Maker Ecosystems

What are Maker Ecosystems?

A combination of hardware offered and web-presence that teaches/sells/builds community around that hardware, as well as the community of makers themselves.

Maker Ecosystems contain a community of practice to support a learner's continued growth.

Research Questions:

When learners are first introduced to fabrication and making, what paths are available to them?

What should be considered when evaluating an ecosystem for use with learners?

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Analysis Factors:

1. Is the ecosystem open or closed?

2. How are the onboarding materials presented?

3. Is there a growth path that supports continued learning and development?

4. What is expected from users to participate?

5. What avenues are available for makers to share their work and knowledge?

Make:
Community

1. Open ecosystem not tied to a particular hardware platform
2. A wide array of community produced activities including classes
3. Lots of resources but they are unstructured
4. There are beginner projects but many require specialized equipment
5. Provides a nexus of social media and a platform of content sharing

littleBits

1. Closed ecosystem built around unique magnetic hardware
2. Tutorials tied to kits for learners with Extra resources for instructors
3. Limited growth path outside of individual kits
4. Very beginner friendly, tutorials break down skills required, Costly Components
5. A company community page with a forum for sharing work or questions

Ecosystems Connect and Overlap

A learner has to choose which ecosystems to participate in, and may need guidance in making choices that fit their goals. Some ecosystems like Make encompass many elements that all work together to provide support.

