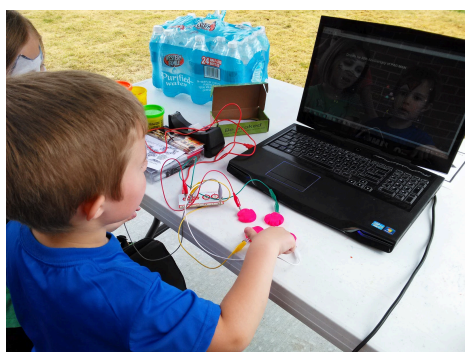


Usu Research Will Help Expand Rural Libraries' Role | CEHS

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LOGAN—Utah State University researchers have received nearly \$482,000 to work with libraries in Northern Utah and the junior high school students they serve. In the next three years, they will help rural libraries continue toward a future that is more interactive and high-tech.

The grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services will involve the rural libraries, students and their families in maker activities, which infuse arts and crafts with technology and engineering. Utah State University has been involved in this movement from its earliest stages, and Dr. Victor Lee, one of the project's leaders, is excited to explore what maker activities can do not only for students, but for libraries.

Partners include North Cache Center in Richmond, and the North Logan Library in North Logan. In its later stages, the project will also involve the Hyrum City Library and South Cache Center.

"The public library is one of our most essential civic spaces," said the associate professor in Instructional Technology and Learning Sciences (ITLS). "The kinds of things libraries do are broadening out of both interest and necessity. There needs to be more research on how the hardworking people who make a library what it is now can smoothly transition into stewards of all the things a library will be in the future."

Dr. Mimi Recker, a professor in ITLS, is a co-principal investigator on the project. She has spent the last year on sabbatical in Boulder, Colorado, taking in its large community library with its state of the art maker space,

concert halls, exhibition area, and programs—including computer coding classes—for children.

Could smaller libraries make similar changes? "I think it's possible, but you have to scale back your expectations," Recker said. "They have a big role to play in terms of informal learning."

A library's role in the community is becoming more active, Lee said, in terms of helping people navigate and use the flood of information that is now available. "That's a big shift from what a lot of library professionals were trained to do," Lee said.

In North Logan, the library is already opening its doors to all kinds of learning activities. The community has come to the building after its hours of operation to participate in arts, crafts, computer classes for seniors and even a live catapult version of Angry Birds.

With this new partnership, Winger hopes to involve students and their families in science, technology, engineering and math. "These kids are going to go to school. Their parents are going to come into the library and learn with them. Hopefully we'll get parents more involved in their own children's education than any formalized public program that we have."

Maker activities are already underway at North Cache, said Alison Griffiths, a teacher and librarian. Teachers in physics, biology, shop and art already have their students engaged in making projects. "My thought is that we will highlight what they're doing so the whole school can see it and get excited about it," she said.

She also wants to discover ways to reach more students, involving them in making and learning activities—and she's looking forward to learning some strategies through the project.

"Another opportunity is to really rethink the school library," Recker said. School libraries are experiencing budget cuts. It's a trend Recker hopes to see change.

The project will build on the skills rural librarians already have. After assessing the needs and opportunities in North Cache and North Logan, the researchers will develop a program that will help librarians add maker practices to the things they are already doing. They will then use that program in additional libraries in Hyrum, Utah, and develop a model for professional development for rural librarians that can be replicated and used in different small communities.

Funding for this project comes from The Institute of Museum and Library Services is the primary source of federal support for the nation's 123,000 libraries and 35,000 museums. Their mission is to inspire libraries and museums to advance innovation, lifelong learning, and cultural and civic engagement. IMLS's grant making, policy development, and research help libraries and museums deliver valuable services that make it possible for communities and individuals to thrive. To learn more, visit www.ims.gov and follow IMLS on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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