



SELF-PUB **booklife**

JOBZONE

THE MILLIONS

Search Publishers Weekly

SUBSCRIBE: PRINT + DIGITAL

LOGIN

SITE LICENSE ACCESS

FREE NEWSLETTERS



NEWS

REVIEWS

BESTSELLERS

CHILDREN'S

AUTHORS

ANNOUNCEMENTS

DIGITAL

Authors | Book News | Industry News

Home > Children's > Industry News

Production Manager - Hachette Book Group - New York, NY.

NEXT JOB ▶

Making a Difference with Makerspaces

By Patricia J. Murphy | Mar 13, 2023

Like 33

Share

Tweet



Comments



Today libraries are many things to different people. As places for engaging storytimes, welcoming and safe havens, and labs for creativity, libraries help expand children's minds. We spoke with three librarians about how their makerspaces are sparking students' creativity and curiosity, and impacting lives.

K-5 librarian and mental health advocate **Liz Smith** sets up makerspace stations on her library's long wooden tables at Titche Elementary School in Dallas, Tex. And while her school doesn't have the funds to create a dedicated makerspace with all the bells and whistles, Smith does everything she can to create meaningful makerspace experiences for her students. She says they deserve nothing less. "We're in an area where our kids don't get exposed to a lot of the same things as kids in the affluent neighborhoods do, so it's really important to me to have a makerspace for them," Smith said.

This exposure is so important to Smith that she has the kids spend a good portion of their library time each week using the makerspace stations. Smith encourages them to create things of their choosing and also has activities or assignments for them to complete. "The more hands-on the better," she said. "And it doesn't have to be expensive. It just has to be things they can use to create with their hands."

Materials include Legos, magnetic shapes, and pentominoes to build with, and art supplies such as crayons, markers, and colored pencils to make artwork. Smith believes it's all about giving kids time to use their imagination. "It's important to tap into the creative parts of their brain, to take a break from all of the testing, and meeting the state's standards,"



© Andrew Molina

Liz Smith.

Smith said. She sees her students exhibiting greater focus and fewer discipline problems, and “becoming better versions of themselves.”

To ensure that these successes continue, Smith enforces a special set of makerspace rules. “These include no hitting or fighting, using ‘please’ and ‘thank you,’” Smith said, “no dumping out the whole tub of materials, and taking care of supplies.” She also pairs two girls and two boys at each station. “There seems to be more social balance when you can do this.”

Smith also balances her kids’ social emotional with their academic learning needs by offering them daily affirmations and breathing exercises, and a calming box. This box contains items including puppets, squishy balls, and coloring pages to ease anxiety issues among others. “I want to teach the whole student—the mind, the body, and the spirit,” Smith said, “and for them to learn how to deal with their emotions, and to be creative.”



© Allison Morneau

Wendy Garland.

A former ballerina and current school librarian, **Wendy Garland** has always had jobs that have kept her on her toes. Today, she’s perfecting the makerspace in the Avery Elementary School library in Dedham, Mass. Her first experience with makerspaces goes back to her days as a teen volunteer at her public library. “I remember the summer our local librarian put three of us in charge of remodeling the library’s dollhouse,” Garland said. “We gave it new wallpaper, painted it, and made new furniture for it. It was an exciting time.”

After 11 years of exploring different directions, Garland finds that the keys to her makerspace’s success are offering many options, having ample supplies, and integrating makerspace activities into

RELATED STORIES:

- More in Children's -> Industry News

Request permission to reprint of this article.

FREE E-NEWSLETTERS

Enter e-mail address

PW Daily Tip Sheet

SUBSCRIBE

More Newsletters

the curriculum and what is happening in school. “This focus has allowed me to create a makerspace with greater meaning for my students and to support and reinforce curriculum for more authentic learning.”

To do this, Garland stays on top of the school’s K-5 curriculum and book needs, and which titles students are checking out, and asks herself a series of questions for greater clarity in her decision-making process: “What are my students curious about? What is the purpose of the activity? What is it that I want my students to do here?”

The answers to Garland’s questions have led her to origami, among other activities. Her students can’t seem to get enough of folding and creating paper rabbits and frogs, and are building a community in the process. “Recently, a new student who moved here from the Republic of Congo couldn’t understand the language, but she could understand how to do origami and started making it with the other students.” Her students also enjoy “building,” *not* “playing,” with Legos.

“It’s all in the phrasing,” Garland said, “as well as the intention and expectation.”

Garland is intent on increasing the makerspace’s inherent social emotional benefits, such as having time to express oneself, making a greater difference in the lives of her students—and adding to the greater good. “One day, I asked myself: ‘Why not create a maker space with greater purpose, as a form of activism?’ ”

The result? Her *Makers on a Mission’s* makerspace’s activities include creating blank zines or books to write and draw in during recess, making toys for rescue dogs from old t-shirts, and crafting pop-up cards for people at a Boston homeless shelter. There’s even a group of students named the “Joke Squad” that meets at the makerspace to write

jokes for the school's daily announcements. "They approached the principal to see if they could present a joke each day for the morning announcements to lift others up."

The space is lifting up the makers as well. Garland finds students from different ability levels and social groups sitting side by side making things, stretching themselves, and opening doors to new adventures. "They're learning about failure and success, which leads them to trying something harder the next time," Garland said, "and this leads them to other parts of the library and ultimately encourages a love of libraries and reading."

K.C. Boyd, the award-winning librarian at Jefferson Academy in Washington, D.C, has found that one of her makerspace's most popular offerings is making with Perler beads. "My students and I absolutely love them," Boyd said. "It is a real draw for kids because they can express themselves and are able to take home something that has a practical use, and that they are proud of."

While some students may choose to create beaded jewelry or coasters, others may make magnets, keychains, or signs. "There are students who make images using patterns, and others may freestyle designs to reflect their personalities."

Whatever or however they decide to bead, they all choose the library makerspace as an escape from the cafeteria at lunch time. "It's really overwhelming for some kids. They can't handle all of the noise and commotion, and they're looking for a calm space," Boyd said. "And that's what I try to create in my makerspace: a calming, therapeutic, and fun place where kids can be creative."

Because beading is such a passion project for Boyd, she pays for the beads and beading projects out of her own pocket. She says it is well worth it. Many students relish the freedom and the time to express their creativity and individuality. Boyd is also nearby for her sixth to eighth graders dealing with anxiety over body changes and/or gender identity. "If they need to chat, I enjoy talking to them, and helping however I can," Boyd said.

For those students who don't enjoy beading, she helps match them with other makerspace offerings, including Minecraft and Roblox, which integrate math, problem-solving, building, and language skills. Boyd calls the handful of regulars her "Makerspace Kids." She supports their daily making and encourages them to check out the latest books. She even gives them dibs on books before she shares them with other classes.

"I know kids who have had negative experiences in libraries. So I'm here to make recommendations, not to tell them what to read," Boyd said. "I want my kids to feel at ease."

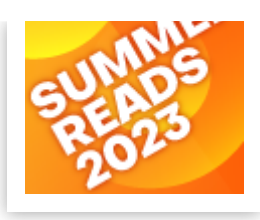
"Eventually, these students come in, try out the makerspace, they see displays... and then they start taking out books. I don't make a big deal about it," Boyd said. However, she does know the big part makerspaces play in drawing in students and offering academic, social, and emotional benefits. "They can also help turn non-readers into readers and be another place like the gym for athletes, where you can feel loved, supported, accepted, and empowered, and part of a community."



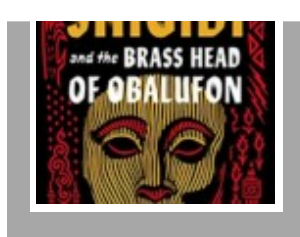
K.C. Boyd.

ALSO ON PW





Summer Reads 2023



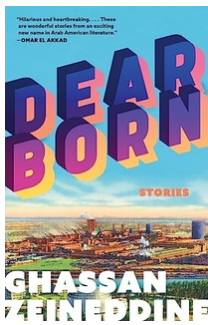
This Week's Starred Reviews



ADVERTISEMENT



FEATURED REVIEWS



DEARBORN

Ghassan Zeineddine. Tin House, \$17.95 trade paper (288p) ISBN 978-1-959030-29-4

◀ PREVIOUS

NEXT ▶

