

Creating MAKERS

Megan Egbert



How to
Start a
**Learning
Revolution**
at Your Library

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How to Start a Learning Revolution at Your Library

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To all the makers in Idaho, who are often overlooked, but never insignificant.
And to my family who allows me the time to be a maker,
specifically through the making of this book.

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Introduction

We are born makers. We move what we're learning from our heads to our hearts through our hands.

—Brown, 2015

In 2012, my library received grant funding, materials, and training to create a makerspace in our public library. This was during the peak time of excitement about makerspaces in libraries and we were quick to say yes to the project. We envisioned our library among the ranks of other leading libraries, providing cutting-edge technology and access to making for our entire city. How hard could it be to create a makerspace, especially if you are receiving funding for it? Three years later, we still did not have a permanent makerspace. It turns out that it can be pretty hard. Space in public libraries is in high demand as libraries transform into the role of community centers. Every part of a library needs to be versatile and able to function in a variety of settings. In my own library, we were not able to find part of our space that we could essentially sacrifice for all other purposes that it was currently being used for. It was a roadblock, for sure, but not the end of our maker journey.

While preparing for a presentation at ALA about making in libraries I told my colleague that I was starting to feel like an imposter. We had not even successfully created a makerspace, yet we were instructing others on how to do just that. My colleague had the brilliant response that set forth our path for the next few years in the way we designed our programs, our collection, and even the way we inspired our fellow staff members. “*While others have been creating spaces, we have been creating makers.*” It resonated immediately, not just because it was catchy and would sound good in a presentation, but because it was true. While some libraries were deliberating over what type of 3D printer to purchase, or how many hoods to place in their makerspace, we were studying human-centered design-thinking and pondering

over how making can foster the deeper learning we strive for in public libraries. Not that our deliberations were any more important than what other libraries had to decide (the type of 3D printer matters!), but it gave us a unique perspective to bring to the conversation.

What we have learned in these three years since we set out on this maker journey is that the space is not necessary to foster making or learning. It is a luxury that some libraries have and others will always long for, but it should not be a hindrance to libraries that want to participate in the maker movement because creating a space should not be the ultimate goal. There is something greater that can be accomplished through making than just an exciting, collaborative, shared space.

As makerspaces continue to pop up at libraries across the nation, more and more children are gaining access to new technology and a new sense of independence from creating their own solutions. Libraries share success stories and program plans and encourage new libraries to come on board every day. But why? What is it that libraries can offer through this type of space or these types of programs, and why is it the role of libraries in the first place? These are all topics that will be addressed in this book and hopefully we will formulate some answers together.

We thought our experience with creating a makerspace would be an adventure in re-envisioning our library space, but it also became a different type of exercise in re-envisioning our services and philosophy. The main thing that changed through the entire process was us, the staff. We became problem solvers, critical thinkers, and creative *makers*. The things we were interested in and the ideas we created trickled down to our patrons through programs and new services. Soon, what started as a pilot project was actually something much richer and beneficial for the library. It was a cultural shift.

This cultural shift is exactly the reason that libraries should care about making. Making is fun, new, and exciting. All of those things have value, and do a service to making by attracting new recruits. But what often gets missed in the discussion about making is that it also matters. Making matters for individuals, it matters for libraries, and it matters for a future of connected and creative learners. Making will leave a lasting impact on the next generations, one that has already started to be carved out.

This book is not intended to serve as a guide for creating a makerspace. It does not address the *how* questions of creating makerspaces. There are many great resources out there that already do that. As librarians, sometimes our first instincts are to dissect a process and organize the information into easily assessable steps. We want to make learning easy and convenient. We have created countless resources for other professionals around the topic of making, including books, white papers, articles, kits, and much more. Each resource is intended to help people start with making right away. Instead, this book will focus on the broader phenomenon that is making. It will ask the