



**Education Review**

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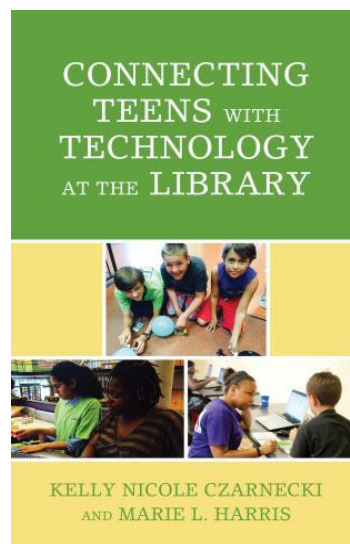
**Czarnecki, K. N., & Harris, M. L. (2021). *Connecting teens with technology at the library*. Rowman & Littlefield.**

**Pp. 99**

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As a young girl, I loved to wander through the library's endless rows of books and inspect the multitude of volumes. In the 21st century, however, many people read books on Kindles or smart devices, leading some to believe that libraries are obsolete (Silka & Rumery, 2013). Yet libraries offer more than just hardcover books. They also extend opportunities to learn about science, technology, engineering, math, and digital literacy, which are essential for future careers and lay the groundwork for future adventures (Hendrix & Williamson, 2017). By providing a comfortable and productive environment specifically created for digital and STEM engagement, technology programs at libraries could be just what is needed to gain the attention of teens and young adults.



In *Connecting Teens with Technology at the Library*, Czarnecki and Harris discuss who teens are, what they do at the library, and ideas for teen interaction with technology in this setting. Both authors are well-versed in library technology programs for teens and young adults, having worked together and managed teen programs at ImaginOn, a branch of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library. Between them, the authors have nearly 20 years' experience working in libraries and programming for teens. With the purpose of helping "support fellow teen-serving staff nationwide in technology creation and collection development" (p. xiii), this edited book is geared toward those involved in informal youth education, including young adult librarians and general librarians, youth leaders, and schoolteachers. Some chapters speak to particular readers more than others, and there is a range of value among the chapters. The writing is casual in style, and chapters include

firsthand experiences and reflections, lists of resources, anecdotes, advice, actionable ideas and examples, and descriptions of programs and activities that educate and engage teens.

This volume is the third of the four-book series *The Teen Librarian Bookshelf*, which aims to share relevant and practical information for teens ages 12 to 18 and young adults who serve as librarians and in other positions at a library. The book starts with a powerful foreword by a young adult who benefited from the library services of the authors. Her inspiring essay highlights the skills and experiences she gained and her newfound appreciation for technology and mentoring and concludes with a call to action for librarians to support their young adult patrons. The following 11 short, standalone chapters, grouped into three major sections, can be read in any order, like a reference manual. The authors encourage readers to jump between chapters, exploring ideas and case studies that are most pertinent and applicable to their current situation.

The book's first section provides a broad overview of technology, libraries, and teen use of both. Specifically, the chapter on technology and teens provides an impressive discussion of the generational status of teens and their interaction with all kinds of technology, including phones, tablets, and PCs. Another chapter focuses on tethering technology programs to library missions and provides mission statements from existing libraries as templates. This chapter also addresses why libraries need a mission statement specific to teen patrons.

In the next section, the authors delve into specific programs, e.g., like mentoring and career readiness, that should be part of a library's young adult technology plan. For example, VolunTeen Studio I Track mentorship program implemented by the authors involved experienced teenage volunteers to serve as mentors to teen participants new to the library's programs. The authors note that the teen mentees in this program gained problem-solving and other life skills as well as technical skills:

While they do not need to pursue a career based on the technology they are learning, they will inevitably apply time management and taking direction no matter what path they decide to follow as they further their education, develop their passion, or find a job. (p. 42)

Similarly, library teen technology programs could offer career exploration and vocation readiness, and potentially internship and job opportunities through library partnerships and collaborations with external businesses and professionals.

In the last section, the authors provide examples, case studies, and suggestions for implementing the ideas presented throughout the text. The section begins with an overview of the now popular low-tech and no-tech options for a technology program that are excellent for individuals who are just beginning their technology or makerspace activities or running multiple community programs. The book also offers an extensive case study of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Library branches and their makerspace environments.

On the topic of makerspaces, the authors emphasize that “a makerspace can be any space, at any time, in which people gather to share supplies and create new things” (p. 69). Many people think of 3D printers when they think of makerspaces. My teenage sons drew, designed, and printed a 3D tugboat at our local library and enjoyed it. However, as the authors illustrate, computer technology is not required for a makerspace. What these spaces do require are engaging programs that are career-focused, inclusive, fun, and educational. For example, my teens took part in an interactive camp at the library in which they built a room-size Rube Goldberg machine. They were excited and focused while creating portions of the chain reaction. Car rides home were filled with animated conversations of what could be implemented or improved next time.

The greatest strengths of this book relate to collection development and implementation. The authors share a useful and concise list of recommended resources to support a library technology program, including suggestions for books on staff development, program inspiration, and participant activities. Another strength is the engaging program ideas, with and without technology, designed to appeal to teenage patrons while developing valuable skills. For example, teens can build a dry ice bubble maker in one session and tutor older adults on personal computers in another. The latter example empowers students to become active citizens who make a difference, providing seniors with improved technology comfort and skills (Beisser, 2012).

Despite its many pluses, the book has some limitations that would have enhanced its usefulness. The authors could have included more specific, concrete recommendations, such as a sample technology plan or list of recommended technologies for setting up a program in a library or other teen-serving spaces. On the topic of funding and fundraising, the authors might have given more practical guidance on requesting or acquiring funding or provided a budget template with a list of possible expenses when starting to design a makerspace. Also, more pragmatic advice on how to script a shared mission or to engage teens in mentoring and career readiness activities would have been helpful to those seeking to enhance or expand existing programs.

*Connecting Teens with Technology at the Library* is an essential resource for teen-serving staff at libraries and other community spaces. Its pages are filled with strong arguments for why libraries need technology-centered programs for teens and young adults and with a wealth of examples and resources to help readers get started. Sharing instructional activities offered in their own libraries, the authors include technology activities that require no technology and sample programs that can be adapted to fit the needs of any library. For anyone seeking to create a more engaging and relevant library experience for teens, I highly recommend this informative and practical book.

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