

Library of Congress Grant Gives Utah's K-3 Teachers Training on Accessing Primary Sources

06/26/2024



K-3 students benefit from an early introduction to primary sources.

Three statewide USU professors in the School of Teacher Education and Leadership (TEAL) in the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services are collaborating on a research grant to provide teachers with picture books, resources, and hands-on training to incorporate primary source materials in their K-3 classrooms. The grant, which caps at \$25K, is funded by Teaching With Primary Sources Western Region (TWPS), a program sponsored by the Library of Congress.

The researchers—Rachel Turner, assistant professor at the USU statewide Eastern campus in Price; Amanda Deliman, assistant professor at the USU Salt Lake Center; and Marla Robertson, associate professor at the Uintah Basin statewide campus in Vernal—are combining their social studies and literacy expertise to provide professional development opportunities to elementary education teachers in Price and Taylorsville. The workshops will be held in August, with visits to classrooms to follow later in the year.

Turner, Deliman, and Robertson have already worked together on various literacy projects in TEAL, but this grant will give them the opportunity to reach teachers directly. “We’ve been doing research and presenting at conferences,” says Turner, “but we haven’t been able to interact with and provide things to teachers. We decided the TWPS grant was a great way to continue what we’re already doing and connect with teachers.”

The grant is enabling Turner, Deliman, and Robertson to incentivize elementary education teachers to attend the day-long workshop. They will receive extensive hands-on training, book lists and resources, and, most importantly, eight to ten new picture books for their classroom.

“One of the greatest benefits of the workshop is to give teachers the books we’re referencing in the training so they can walk away and say, ‘I have the book, I have the sources. I’m ready to get started,’” says Turner, principal investigator on the research team.

Robertson agrees. “Using picture books is an excellent way to integrate social studies and literacy in elementary classrooms. We are intentionally choosing recent award-winning children’s books that are related to contemporary and historical issues in Utah.”



Drs. Rachel Turner, Amanda Deliman, and Marla Robertson

At the training, the facilitators will discuss with teachers the general benefits of primary sources and then teach them where to find primary sources online. (The Library of Congress is just one of many.) Teachers will also learn how students in their classrooms can be actively engaged in the activity instead of just being shown a digital document or photograph. Finally, the facilitators will model for the teachers how to access and use the sources that correlate with the picture books they receive at the workshop.

“Helping local teachers access quality resources and training is vital for creating engaging and meaningful classroom experiences,” says Deliman. “We are eager to equip educators with resources that may inspire them to craft compelling lessons for their students.”

The team recognizes the potential for increased learning for young students. “Our goal is for students to learn context and historical background so they have a more holistic perspective of the stories their teachers are reading to them,” says Turner, whose expertise is on social studies instruction in the elementary grades. “In addition, with primary sources, children are learning a lot of important skills that go far beyond memorizing basic history facts. They are comparing and contrasting, observing, analyzing, and more.”

Steven Camicia, department head of TEAL and professor with a focus on social studies instruction in the elementary grades, said, "Primary sources are central to high-quality social studies education. Students can examine different types of primary sources to develop conclusions about a range of events and topics. This project's holistic approach will serve a variety of instructional objectives."

For example, if a class is having a science lesson, the teacher may not be thinking about integrating history, but he or she will have an opportunity to expose students to scientists. "This will help children see that science doesn't just come out of nowhere," says Turner. "It is real people who perform the research and make the discoveries."

Incorporating original source materials into a lesson can be successfully done with the training teachers receive at the workshop. Turner gives the example of the 2018 picture book, *Joan Proctor, Dragon Doctor*, which is about a veterinarian from the early 1900s whose life-long research expanded the world's knowledge about reptiles. Teachers can access photographs and other documents of Proctor's work at the Library of Congress website.

"After reading the picture book to her class," explains Turner, "a teacher could discuss how people influence science. Then the teacher could show students some photographs of the actual Joan Proctor so they can see what she looked like and the work she did. The Library of Congress has great photos of her working with children at the London Zoo, where she would put together tea parties for visiting children and her pet Komodo Dragon. There are some really cool photos, maps, and other documents that show Proctor's work."

Turner continues: "Some teachers may look at primary sources and wonder why they would want to include them in their lessons. But if they pair them with something they're already doing, teaching with primary sources will be an easy addition—and the potential benefits are worth the effort."

The TWPS grant is a regional program that is part of a larger federal grant program. Turner, Deliman, and Robertson are hoping to expand the project in the future with a federal grant, which caps at \$100K. They envision taking the workshops statewide and/or including many more Utah teachers in the workshops so children across the state will benefit from original source materials in their classrooms. They also envision working with web developers to create a website that will house the information they provide at the trainings. Ultimately, they want to make the information they're providing readily

accessible to all teachers as well as to educational organizations.

Learn more and register for the [Price](#) or [Taylorsville](#) workshop by clicking on the link.