KVCR Transcript

Ken Vincent: UC Riverside has been awarded a grant to study if children's television programming can generate greater interest among young people in pursuing STEM skills; science, technology, engineering and mathematics. We have more from KVCR's Matt Guilhem.

Matt Guilhem: UC Riverside was recently awarded 885,000 dollars of a 2.5 million dollar grant from the National Science Foundation to investigate the link between children's television and raising kids' interest in STEM learning. UCR associate professor of psychology, Rebekah Richert, is leading a team of researchers which include professors at Northwestern and Georgetown universities. Although generating interest in math and science is a major facet of her research. Richert said the main goal of the project is to examine children's relationships with television characters.

Dr. Richert: What our approach can help us understand is not just about learning specific STEM content, for example, how to add numbers together or how to understand biological processes. But really about how we can use things like again children's relationships with characters, if those characters are very excited about learning and they're excited about exploring their world then what it's doing is really setting up a different kind of mentality for approaching the world and then specifically STEM education as opposed to focusing too much specifically on STEM content.

Matt Guilhem: While Richert's colleague at Georgetown will be looking at the popular character, Elmo, Richert's lab will focus on Dora the Explorer and Sid the Science Kid.

Dr. Richert: One of the reasons we chose those two characters is that they tend to be ones that when we ask kids which characters they like they tend to rank for the top and additionally they're characters that incorporate into their shows the kinds of learning we're interested in testing children for.

Matt Guilhem: After watching several clips from shows Richert and her team have selected, children will be tested on what they learned from the programs. Being in their formative years the children in the study will also be asked how they perceived the characters.

Dr. Richert: One of the other things that's happening during these years is children are beginning to form their stereotypes about gender and ethnicity as those might be related to things like different STEM concepts or careers. So we are also testing children on those kinds of things as well when they come in.

Matt Guilhem: The aim of the 5 year grant is to produce quality programming and games for children that will hopefully engaged them with STEM principles. Richert is optimistic that the data gained by this initial round of experiments will lay the groundwork for future studies. With KVCR news, I'm Matt Guilhem.