Media Mentorship in Libraries
Serving Youth

ALSC
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Abstract

The number of children and families who use digital media is growing, and children require mediated and guided experiences with digital media for the experiences to translate into positive and productive digital literacy skills. Libraries have the capacity to support families with all their literacy needs, traditional and digital, including needs as they arise. Librarians and youth services staff support children and their families in their decisions and practice around media use. Library staff serving youth and families embrace lifelong learning, take advantage of training programs, and create opportunities to develop media mentor skills. It is the responsibility of library training programs, including library schools and formal professional development opportunities, to prepare future and current librarians and youth services practitioners to serve as media mentors. It is the responsibility of supervisors, administrations, and professional associations to support practitioners in this capacity.

Background

Libraries serving children and their families serve ever-evolving roles. In the contemporary youth services landscape, families engage in media in a variety of formats: print books, the bread and butter of our collections; audiobooks and audiovisual materials; and, most recently, digital media. As the materials and services required by the families we serve change and expand, our core functions as practitioners serving youth change and expand as well. This premise of providing responsive and essential services is built into ALSC's Competencies for Librarians Serving Children in Public Libraries, updated most recently in 2009. These core competencies assert the necessity of youth services staff regularly assessing community needs (I.3); responding to needs of the service population (I.6); creating and providing an environment that is both enjoyable and offers "convenient access to and use of library resources" (I.7); listening to children and families to ascertain their needs (III.2); and continually developing skills pertaining to technology and related tools (IX.2). All five of these competencies contribute to a central concept: that it is a fundamental responsibility of youth services staff to meet the needs of children and their families with regard to both access to and support of digital media, and to prioritize the development of our own knowledge of these areas so that we might best serve our communities.

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There is little doubt that our communities are utilizing, and have personal interest in, digital media. Digital media refers predominantly to apps and e-books, but it may also include software programs as well as broadcast and streaming media. Typically, digital media involve one or more aspects of interactivity "designed to facilitate active and creative use by young children to encourage social engagement with other children and adults" (Schomburg and Donohue 2012, 1). In 2013, the most recent year for which Common Sense Media—one of the only organizations collecting and publishing data on children's

and Braafladt (2012), "Storytimes were never about teaching kids to read; rather they were developed to expose them to literacy practices in a safe setting with a wider array of tools than most families could provide" (8).

There is precedent for libraries creating and tailoring programming and services to best meet the needs of the children and families they serve, and this relatively newer need for digital literacy is no different. It follows that libraries, in fulfilling their charge, support young children and families in this digital landscape to the best of our abilities.

Yet when it comes to supporting families in a world of tablets, apps, and interactive e-books, libraries providing access to the media and relevant equipment is not, in and of itself, enough. Access alone is insufficient for facilitating children's positive and fruitful experiences with digital media; there also needs to be a degree of both regulation and modeling of use by adult caregivers for the digital media experience to be productive (Takeuchi 2011). Access to media only provides children exposure to certain functionalities of the media and platforms. Yet even this exposure may itself be inherently limited, as technology and media of any type may not be fully accessible to children if there is no caregiver positioned to provide guidance (Daugherty, Dossani, Johnson, and Oguz 2014). If a child requires the instruction of an adult in order to use digital media appropriately and effectively, then mounting an iPad in the youth department alone does little to develop the digital literacy skills of the children who attempt to use it.

digital media use—released statistics, 75 percent of households owned digital media in some format, up from 52 percent in 2011. Ownership of tablet devices, like iPads and similar touch screen devices, increased 500 percent in that same period, with 40 percent of families with children 8 or younger owning at least one such device in 2013. Additionally, in 2013, 72 percent of children ages 0 to 8 had used digital media of some kind (Rideout 2013; The Nielsen Company 2014). Use and exposure to digital media among children and families is both high and growing. Digital media is clearly highly relevant to the families we serve every day.

Even as families have increasing access to digital media, there remains a gap in families having information pertaining to how to utilize digital media and their supporting devices effectively and educationally (Vaala 2013). Digital literacy, as a result, is of tantamount importance. This need for services and collections that support the development of digital literacy fits squarely within the purview of library services for children and their families. Indeed, the programming and services for which libraries are most well-known have historically supported specific literacy needs among the service population. According to Nelson

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range of youth. Children who are less likely to have direct adult or caregiver guidance when using digital media, and the Internet in particular, tend to "spend more time on lower-quality Web sites or activities that won't help them develop school-based skills" (Gutnick et al. 2010, 22), regardless of how much time a child spends with the media.

Quantity of exposure is no substitute for the quality of experiences. High-quality experiences with media of all types are not limited to supporting digital literacy skills development, however; rich experiences also support development of other core

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literacies, including social-emotional literacy and media literacy, both of which are integral for youth to succeed as both students and eventual members of the workforce (The Aspen Institute Task Force on Learning and the Internet 2014). Naidoo (2014) indicates that digital media experiences can be used to foster global understanding and empathy as well as cultural competence, which contribute to social-emotional literacy. Media literacy, too, is a vital component of twenty-first-century skills, and "technology-infused programs for older youth, then, are simply storytimes for the twenty-first century—exposing kids to key literacy skills at a critical time in their lives" (Nelson and Braafladt 2012, 9). Positive digital media experiences can support the educational and literacy development of children in myriad ways, a fact with which caregivers seem familiar.

In the report Learning at Home, Rideout (2014) reported that 57 percent of parents claim their children have gained knowledge in a particular subject

through use of educational media. These parents see the potential for positive uses of media, yet only 44 percent of survey participants considered their children's screen media use to be educational. There seems to be a gap between what caregivers see as the potential positive benefits of digital media, and their ability to support their children in using said media most effectively. That gap is the perfect place for the library to step in with knowledge, modeling, and support.

To be clear, although digital media and tablet technology are still relatively new—the iPad debuted in 2010—there does exist a significant pool of knowledge about children's use of digital media. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has been making recommendations pertaining to children's media use the longest, with more than thirty years' worth of evolving positions. The AAP Council on Communications and Media released their most recent statement in 2013, at which point they offered a number of recommendations, including

➜ that health-care providers educate themselves on topics pertaining to media;

➜ that well-child visits include questions regarding a children's daily recreational screen time and whether the child has a television or device with Internet access in the bedroom;

➜ that caregivers limit children's entertainment screen time to less than one to two hours daily;

➜ that children under the age of two should not be exposed to screen media;

➜ that caregivers monitor their children's media use, both in terms of time spent with media and the types of media being accessed; and

➜ that caregivers establish a family media plan.

tivity, tailorability, portability, and facilitation of joint engagement. New digital media, Christakis asserts, is fundamentally different from the type of screen time about which the AAP has been advising for decades, and as such requires new and unique recommendations. Radesky, Schumacher, and Zuckerman (2015) share this position, citing the interactive aspects of media in their call for further research on young children and media. The trio also argues that families require media guidance even amidst ongoing research. They specifically recommend that caregivers be encouraged to try a technology before allowing their children to use it, and they also advise that caregivers engage in technology use with their children.

In 2012, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children's Media released a joint position statement that has widely been considered the counterpoint to the AAP position (Schomburg and Donohue 2012). This joint statement begins deliberately with a definition of interactive media and its difference from traditional, passive screen media, a point that Christakis (2014) argues the AAP should also make. Ultimately, Schomburg and Donohue (2012) declare that "technology and interactive media are tools that can promote effective learning and development when they are used intentionally by early childhood education, within the framework of developmentally appropriate practice, to support learning goals established for individual children" (5). This position is transformational, acknowledging that positive uses exist for young children and digital media when those media are utilized and moderated by an adult caregiver in ways that are intentional, appropriate, and relevant to the child using the media. These caveats for positive use mirror

This 2013 AAP position statement differed from its predecessors in the recommendations that well-child visits include discussion of media use and that families create media plans, but a number of health professionals responded that the crux of the position remained too much the same as previous incarnations. Rich (2014) asserts that this the AAP statement relies too heavily on potential negative effects of screen use at the expense of fully considering positive and prosocial uses; he argues that this reliance on negative effects reduces the resonance of the AAP position with parents, many of whom feel their children are not susceptible to the potential serious and long-term detrimental effects of media use. Christakis (2014), on the other hand, takes issue with the AAP's unchanging recommendation of no screen time for children under age two, as well as their static definition of screen time. Christakis proffers that touch screen devices require their own recommendations separate from traditional screen media (i.e., television) because of their reactivity, interac-

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the concept of the "three Cs" offered by Guernsey (2012); she asserts that any discussion of media use with children cannot be separate from also discussing the content of the media, the context in which it is being used, and the individual child who is engaging in the media experience.

In addition to considering the individual circumstances of digital media use by children, how and with whom the device is used are also important factors. This concept, termed joint media engagement, is defined as "spontaneous and designed experiences of people using media together" (Takeuchi and Stevens 2011, 10). This practice of interacting with media together allows the experience itself, as well as the content of the media, to resonate more deeply with the child using it. This resonance is especially true for young children jointly engaging with media with an adult caregiver, where the caregiver can use their knowledge and access to additional materials or spaces to extend the activities or concepts from the media beyond

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that media (e.g., arranging a walk in a park as an extension of a shared media experience pertaining to autumn leaves). Recent guidelines from Zero to Three reiterate the positive effects of joint media engagement (Lerner and Barr 2014), emphasizing the necessity of caregivers participating in screen use, making that use interactive, and extending the content beyond the screen to maximize learning. Daugherty, Dossani, Johnson, and Wright (2014) assert that these metrics—how and with whom the technology is being used and what the content offers—are more important in evaluating children's media use and habits than considering screen time alone.

Additional research exists beyond these formal position statements. With regard to potential educational aspects of digital media and its ability to positively impact children who engage with it, touch screen technology allows children to learn through hands-on experience, offering "a mode of interactive experience that mirrors the children's natural constructivist learning" (U.S. Department of Education and Michael Cohen Group 2012, 2). Similarly, app design has been shown to be a factor in educational impact. With book apps in particular, steady pacing, few distractions, and limited sound effects or games correlate to greater positive effects of app use (Parish-Morris et al. 2013). Furthermore, apps and digital games with multiplayer capabilities have been shown to support prosocial development, with students playing together presenting better social skills than solitary players (Takeuchi and Vaala 2014). Research also indicates some of the potential negative effects of poor media-use habits, in particular with regard to heavy use at the expense of other, nondigital media experiences. Constant exposure to and use of digital media may affect children's ability to properly interpret social cues in face-to-face interactions (Uhls et al. 2014), a fact that is potentially troubling considering caregivers are less likely to impose restrictions on the quantity of time spent engaging with media than they are to restrict types of media (Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts 2010).

Amidst these existing position statements and research findings, it is worthwhile to consider how libraries are currently responding to this changing digital landscape. A 2014 survey by ALSC, Littlee-Lit.com, and the iSchool at the University of Washington aimed to understand a piece of that landscape, honing in on new media use with young children. The study found that, of the 415 individual libraries and library systems that participated in the survey (ranging in legal service-area population from fewer than 5,000 customers to more than

services library staff as a fundamental resource and support in the digital lives and decisions of the families we serve.

Considering the potential positive outcomes for children engaging with developmentally appropriate media, the goal of supporting families in creating a realistic media diet is a worthy one (Vossen, Piotrowski, and Valkenburg 2015). Indeed, the AAP's call for families to develop a family media plan implies just that—that setting intentional and appropriate parameters for family media use is positive and recommended (2013). It is within the capacity of youth services practitioners in particular to take on this role of media mentors; we are already expected to be familiar with child development, to support families in their information seeking, and to keep abreast of developments that pertain to and impact the families we serve (Association for Library Service to Children 2009). Embracing media mentorship simply incorporates a highly relevant and responsive service into our fundamental dedication to serving the children and families in our communities where they are, to the best of our abilities, and regardless of the format of preferred material. Indeed, this role is a worthwhile and needed one, in particular regard to digital media; re-

one million customers), 71 percent reported new media use in some capacity in programming and services for young children. The most frequent types of tablet utilization were offering tethered devices for young children in the library (40 percent of respondents) and using devices as part of storytime programming (39 percent of respondents). Libraries also indicated making devices available for checkout and use both inside and out of the library. Ninety libraries, or 22 percent of the survey population, reported providing device mentoring services (Mills et al., forthcoming). While this data regarding device use and tablet ownership resembles the 2013 Common Sense Media family media-use data, the comparatively small number of libraries currently offering device mentorship in any capacity would seem to be the area primed for growth.

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search indicates the huge potential impact of youth services libraries filling this role: "Teachers, childcare providers, and families could benefit from seeing both appropriate and inappropriate practices in action" (Daugherty, Dossani, Johnson, and Wright 2014, 6). The needs of the children and families we serve—both spoken and implicit—and the fundamental role of librarians and youth services staff as resource and support for these children and families situate our profession to serve our communities in the capacity of media mentor.

In 2014, Lisa Guernsey, director of the New America Foundation's Early Education Initiative, gave a TEDx talk in which she proposed, "What if we were to commit to ensure that every family with young children had access to a media mentor? This could be someone like a children's librarian." With this suggestion, Guernsey ushered in the idea of youth

Position

Taking into account the core functions of library services for youth, the evolving digital landscape, and children's and families' needs for support and resources, the following is recommended:

→ Every library have librarians and other staff serving youth who embrace their role as media mentors for their community.

→ Media mentors support children and families in their media use and decisions.

→ Library schools provide resources and training to support future librarians and youth services practitioners in serving as media mentors.

→ Professional development for current librarians and youth services practitioners include formal training and informal support for serving as media mentors.

In their report Growing Young Minds, the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) asserted

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the vital role of libraries as centers for providing families support and access to media of all kinds (Howard 2013). As "important community digital hubs, with expertise promoting digital, media, and information literacy" (22), libraries have already assumed an informal role in providing children and their families with access to and experiences in the digital landscape. With the IMLS recommending that federal and state policy makers, communities, schools, families, and funders better utilize the capacity of libraries to support children's learning, libraries can transform current informal access and experiences into full-fledged, robust support for families. By supporting librarians and other staff to

embrace their role as media mentors, libraries are ensuring that they are equipped to support the developing and evolving needs of youth and families. A commitment to media mentorship in every library is a firm commitment to the full spectrum of being a supporter and champion of literacy.

Media mentors support children and their families in their decisions and practice around media use. This role encompasses a variety of strategies for support, with each child or family requiring individual mentoring to ensure that support is respectful, appropriate, and relevant.

The fundamental role of media mentors, according to Guernsey, is to assist families to "make choices about media and learn to use that media in developmentally appropriate ways" (as cited in Jackson 2014). A foundational aspect of this type of support is having access to and sharing recommendations for and research on children's media use from established medical, educational, and institutional sources. A media mentor provides recommendations to meet a family's stated or implied needs based on authoritative recommendations. A family looking for recommendations will be given these resources with objective interpretation by the media mentor, and it is up to the family to use the recommendations to make their own decisions regarding media use. As each family is different, so, too, will their media-use choices and habits be different—from eschewing all screen time to extensive media use, and everything in between.

In addition to providing access to and knowledge of media recommendations and research, media mentors provide opportunities "to help

librarians and youth services practitioners to serve in this capacity. As "a well-trained facilitator is one of the most important determinants of whether technology use will result in skill growth" (Daugherty, Dossani, Johnson, and Oguz 2014, 16), future librarians and youth services staff require robust and comprehensive training in order to best support children and families in their digital literacy development. Library training programs, in particular library schools, should ensure future librarians and youth services practitioners have access to this training. Appropriate training includes full exploration of existing recommendations and research regarding children's media use; hands-on experience with digital media in both programmatic and one-on-one support settings; and resources for continued skill development and knowledge growth.

young children navigate, filter, and learn from the teeming media around them" (Guernsey 2013b). Media mentors actively engage with children and families interacting with digital media provided within the library context, both guiding children through positive and efficient uses of the technology and modeling for caregivers how they can support their children's digital literacy development outside of the library. Once families have made their media-use decisions, media mentors support those decisions to the best of their abilities. This

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level of support may include providing access to technology; offering programming with intentional technology use and related digital literacy learning experiences and information; and any other activities that support children and their families in using the technology they choose to use as appropriately and educationally as possible.

In order for every librarian and library staff serving youth to act as a media mentor, it is integral that library training programs adequately prepare future

Librarians and youth services practitioners currently engaged in work in libraries also require training and support in order to fulfill their role as media mentors. It is essential that professional development opportunities, both formal and informal, include resources and support pertaining to this role. Formal professional development should include the same media-mentor training components as outlined for library schools: exploration of recommendations and research, hands-on experience, and resources for continued development. It is the responsibility of professional organizations, state libraries, and other established training providers to offer these formal professional development opportunities.

Librarians and youth services practitioners must be encouraged to develop their capacity as media mentors individually as well. This type of informal professional development should include identifying "trusted sources for resources and recommendations on technology and interactive media" (Donohue 2014, 6), including media evaluators such as librarians and reviewers; developing personal technology skills and digital media literacy; experimenting "with tools that enable children to create with old and new media" (Guernsey 2013a); and seeking out recent research on literacies, child brain development, and education. It is the responsibility of individual librarians and youth services practitioners, their supervisors, library administrations, and organizations setting standard competencies to recognize that media mentorship is a core function of serving youth and families, and to support development of media mentorship skills appropriately.

Conclusion

One of the strongest connections libraries have in the community is with children and families, and the children and families we serve are using digital media in increasing numbers. At the same time, many of these members of our communities lack the guidance and support to utilize such technology in ways that are ultimately productive, efficient, or educational for children. As an institution dedicated to supporting the rich literacy lives of our communities, and as professionals committed to the service of children and families, embracing

and responding to this evolving landscape demonstrates our continued commitment to our communities' needs.

We must recognize the prevalence of media in the lives of our service populations and equip ourselves to best support them in their intentional, appropriate, and positive use of media. Librarians and youth services staff are embracing media mentorship in this capacity in order to serve families as they make their media decisions and develop digital and media literacy. This role as media mentor is a core function of supporting the lives and literacies of children and families in a twenty-first-century library. Equipping youth services practitioners to serve as media mentors is the shared responsibility of library training programs, creators of professional standards and professional development opportunities, and decision makers and practitioners at every level of library operations. With a strong commitment to media mentorship for youth and families, and to training youth services staff to be media mentors, libraries continue to fulfill their mission of supporting and meeting the needs of those we serve. ■

As an institution dedicated to supporting the rich literacy lives of our communities, and as professionals committed to the service of children and families, embracing and responding to this evolving landscape demonstrates our continued commitment to our communities' needs.

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- School Library Journal's "Apps Reviews," http://www.slj.com/category/reviews/apps/#
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About the Authors

Cen Campbell

Cen Campbell is a children's librarian and the founder at LittleeLit.com. She has driven a bookmobile, managed branch libraries, developed innovative programs for babies, young children and teens, and now supports children's librarians to serve as media mentors in their communities. She was named Library Journal Mover & Shaker in 2014 for her work on LittleeLit.com.
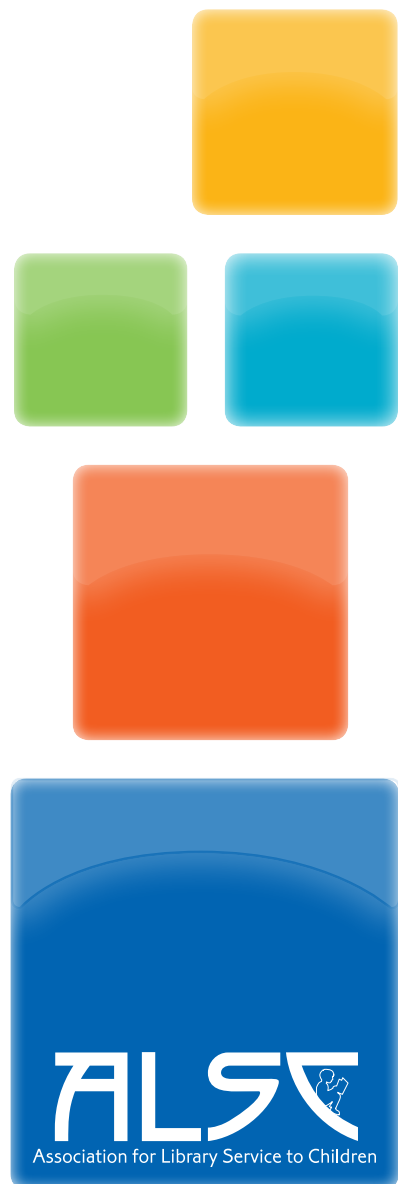
Claudia Haines

Claudia Haines is the Youth Services Librarian at the Homer Public Library (Alaska). She designs and leads programs for young people ages eighteen and under and their families, provides community outreach, and manages the library's children and teen collections. She serves on both local and national committees that support early literacy and families, including the EMIERT Guidelines for Selecting Multicultural Materials Task Force. She provides training for other librarians using new media with young children and recently contributed to the book Young Children, New Media, and Libraries: A Guide for Incorporating New Media into Library Collections, Services, and Programs for Families and Children Ages 0-5 (2015). She blogs at www.nevershushed.com.

Amy Koester

Amy Koester is Youth & Family Program Coordinator at Skokie (IL) Public Library, where she coordinates programs for children through grade five and their families as well as manages fiction collections for youth and teens. She is editor of the book Young Children, New Media, and Libraries: A Guide for Incorporating New Media into Library Collections, Services, and Programs for Families and Children Ages 0-5, and blogs regularly as the Show Me Librarian. Amy served on the 2014 Newbery Award Committee and is currently chair of the ALSC Public Awareness Committee.

Dorothy Stoltz

Dorothy Stoltz coordinates programming and outreach services at Carroll County (MD) Public Library. She spearheaded a successful early literacy training study for Carroll using home child care providers and three and four year olds. She is co-author of several ALA Editions books, including, Tender Topics: Picture Books about Life's Challenges (2013), The Power of Play: Designing Early Learning Spaces (2015), and an upcoming book on early childhood collaborations. In 2011 she became a member of the ALSC/PLA Every Child Ready to Read Oversight Committee, and its chair for 2014-2015.

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