Media Mentorship with Our Youngest Library Users and Their Families

by Abby Maier Johnson

Thanks to a VLA Professional Development Grant, I recently completed the online course, "Technology, Literacy, and Young Children: Media Mentorship for Newborns to Five-Year-Olds and Their Families". The class was offered by Library Juice Academy, and the instructor was Claudia Haines, a Youth Services librarian, author, and the creator of the blog, nevershushed.com I took the course to fulfil the technology requirement for the Certificate of Public Librarianship, and also because I have been feeling a bit behind the curve with technology and unsure how to catch up. The fact that this course was geared towards understanding using technology with our youngest library users, ages 0-5, was very appealing to me- this is an issue that our families deal with at the library and at home, and I wanted to have more tools to help all of us to understand what is happening in the quickly evolving world of media. My initial reaction to tech and young kids was a pretty clear "no", and I was prepared to dig in my heels against a barrage of apps, games, and tech toys. But as the course progressed, I started to understand that there is much more to using technology with children, and that librarians are at the forefront of helping families with these choices. Two main overarching ideas came out of this class: the concepts of media mentorship and Joint Media Engagement. These concepts were explored by many readings, discussions, and presentations throughout the four week course.

Librarians are already serving as media mentors- we help families choose books, CD's and games from sources that we have reviewed and trust. When we incorporate technology into those recommendations, the same rules apply. Not all technology is created the same- we have to evaluate the games, apps, e-books, and toys in the same way that we do other library materials- this includes the quality of the artwork, design, narration, ease of use, tech requirements, and the educational components. Just because something is marketed as educational doesn't mean it actually is. We looked at several tools in the course to help make these choices, including the one found here from KIDMAP (Kids Inclusive and Diverse Media Action Project), which was designed to guide both consumers and designers of the programs.
https://www.joinkidmap.org/digchecklist

There has been enough research now to know that while technology can help kids with language development, math skills, or science concepts, it is most beneficial when the media is used with the guidance and interaction of a caregiver, a concept called Joint Media Engagement (JME). We can model this interaction for our library families by showing how to explore and ask questions with apps or games within a storytime, just like we do with books. Just as we talk to parents about different ways to engage with reading together with their children, we can encourage the idea of Joint Media Engagement with technology. However, the research is also clear that for children under 18-24 months old, tech use should be limited. Video chat programs such as Skype

can be beneficial to developing language skills in young children, but again should be used with a caregiver and in limited amounts of time. The American Association of Pediatrics publishes recommendations around media use, and the most recent report can be found here: https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/138/5/e20162591

The course was structured with weekly reading assignments, surveys, prompts for discussion forums, and one to two additional assignments, each meant to be useful to examining our use of technology in our own library setting. We drafted asides for caregivers about new media use with young children, in much the same way that we do for early literacy tips. We created a plan for reaching underserved families with information on new media, wrote a review of an app, game, e-book, or toy and discussed how we currently serve as media mentors. The final assignment was the creation of a plan for a program that involved at least one form of new media.

I am planning to take some baby steps at the library to incorporate tech and tips into a few areas. I plan to use a simple app during storytime once a month to start, to provide an opportunity to do some modeling of Joint Media Engagement and to start conversations with caregivers about media use in their family. I would also like to create a brochure with helpful links, recommendations, and resources for parents and caregivers to learn about new media, and to distribute the brochure to childcare providers through our Bookmobile stops. I plan to create new signage for programs that we do provide, such as abcmouse.com, to help new users get started with the program. I will also be putting some links on the desktops of our computers to trusted sites such as PBS Kids, to help kids and caregivers find quality content.

I came away from the course with much more of an understanding about the place of tech in the children's room and in my role in helping families make choices about the many forms of new media. It was refreshing to find a path to using and understanding technology and to know that I don't need to be an expert to begin helping families wade through the many choices around media use.

This course was full of very useful articles and tools, many of which opened the door to even more resources. Here are a few that you may find useful:

Never Shushed
Claudia Haines' resource page on media mentorship is full of articles, books, reports and videos https://nevershushed.com/media-mentor-resources/
Common Sense Media
Nonprofit, independent organization that provides reviews, ratings, and advice on media use for parents and educators https://www.commonsensemedia.org/

Media Mentorship in Libraries Serving Youth (ALSC White Paper)
http://www.ala.org/alsc/sites/ala.org.alsc/files/content/2015%20ALSC%20White%20Paper_FINAL.pdf
Young Children, New Media and Libraries 2018 Survey
http://www.ala.org/alsc/sites/ala.org.alsc/files/content/professional-tools/tech_survey_infographic18.pdf
How the iPad Affects Young Children and What We Can Do About It- 2014TEDx Talk by Lisa Guernsey of the New America Foundation's Early Education Initiative
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P41_nyYY3Zg