BECOMING A MEDIA MENTOR

A Guide for Working with Children and Families

CLAUDIA HAINES, CEN CAMPBELL
and the
ASSOCIATION FOR LIBRARY SERVICE TO CHILDREN (ALSC)

FOREWORD BY
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Foreword

Every Child Needs a Media Mentor

I recently watched a video on Facebook in which well-known celebrities thanked a particular teacher who helped them along the way and influenced who they became. It got me thinking about teachers, role models, and mentors and how these important adults can impact the life of a child, never knowing just how great a difference they've made. Fred Rogers said:

> Each one of us here has people who have helped us come this far in our lives. *Nobody* gets to be a competent human being without the investment of others. (Fred Rogers, keynote address, Annual Conference of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, Anaheim, California, 1993)

Who helped you navigate your childhood? Perhaps it was a parent or sibling, a friend, or a neighbor. Maybe it was a teacher, a coach, or a librarian.

Every child needs a media mentor. Every parent or caregiver needs a media mentor. But in the fast-paced digital age, where do we find these trusted tour guides and role models? In the past few years I've been delighted to see the emergence of media mentors for children and parents in many settings, including libraries, children's museums, out-of-school-time programs,

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child-care programs, schools and early childhood settings, and home visiting programs.

Media mentorship is being embraced by librarians and literacy specialists, children's museum staff, early childhood educators, child life specialists, pediatric health providers, home visitors, parent educators, and others who support children and their families. I've come to understand that media mentors come in all shapes and sizes, from formal and informal learning environments, with diverse academic backgrounds and preparation, and with a wide range of attitudes and dispositions about the role of technology and digital media in the lives of children. But what does it take to become a trusted source, role model, and media mentor who can guide children, parents, caregivers, and families as they select and use media?

In this wonderful and timely book for librarians and literacy specialists, Cen Campbell (my media mentor) and Claudia Haines describe what media mentorship is and what it can look like in libraries. They offer tangible and authentic examples and case studies of what it looks like when librarians take on the role of media mentor for children, parents, and the community. They've assembled a tool kit for would-be media mentors to help support children, parents, caregivers, and families in their media use and choices.

Campbell and Haines have identified trends in digital media that have had or will have an impact on libraries and librarians, including apps, e-books, and multi–touch screens as well as coding and makerspaces that promote the child as a media creator, not just a media consumer. They have described what it means to be a digital-age librarian working at the intersection of child development, early learning, literacy development, and children's media. And they have reminded us that librarians are well prepared and uniquely suited for media mentorship, with knowledge and skills in curating and evaluating high-quality, age-appropriate media, matching media tools and content to the individual child, and modeling effective, intentional, and appropriate use of all types of media with children.

Twenty-first-century learners need twenty-first-century teachers and role models. They need media mentors who have strengthened their own digital media literacy and are curious about the when, how, where, and who of new media tools. They need media innovators who want to address access and equity issues, promote language and literacy, open new doors for communicating with families, and create new opportunities for technology-mediated professional learning through collaborating with other librarians and connecting with media mentors in informal and formal settings.

This book reminds us that media mentorship by its nature is built on a relationship. When the selection and use of digital media are also grounded in relationships, opportunities for joint engagement and enhanced learning increase. Children and their families need relationships with mindful media

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mentors who are positive, enthusiastic tour guides and curious co-explorers in the digital age.

> My hunch is that if we allow ourselves to give who we really are to the children in our care, we will some way inspire cartwheels in their hearts. (Fred Rogers, keynote address, Annual Conference of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, Anaheim, California, 1993)

Who inspired cartwheels in your heart as a child? Who would you like to thank for being your mentor and role model? Honor their impact on you by embracing media mentorship and becoming a media mentor who brings all of who you really are to your work with children and their parents, caregivers, and families. The authors have gathered ideas, examples, and prompts to encourage and enrich you on the way. And they have reminded us that it's not about technology, it's about the relationships.

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CLAUDIA HAINES AND
CEN CAMPBELL

Preface

Long before the term *media mentorship* came to be, a group of children's librarians was talking about this new thing called the iPad and what its use would mean for families, literacy, and libraries. First as part of informal discussions, then during conference sessions, and later on LittleeLit.com and other platforms, those of us leading storytimes, hosting after-school programs, and helping caregivers access needed information were trying to figure out how to use the (then) new technology that families were bringing to the library and using at home. The group of librarians grew to include early childhood experts, educators, researchers, and parents. We all had one common goal—to meet the media, information, and literacy needs of families. Over time we unearthed research, documented examples of promising practices, and shared challenges and successes in a way that created a conversation that spanned the profession and made connections across disciplines with similar goals.

Lisa Guernsey, a friend to our group of collaborators from the beginning, recognized the role librarians could easily play in supporting families as they navigate the "digital Wild West" and in 2012 used her TED talk to introduce the idea of media mentorship. This new name for our evolving job description was immediately embraced by many youth services staff members and by the

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Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), which would later publish the white paper *Media Mentorship in Libraries Serving Youth* (see appendix A) written by the two of us along with Amy Koester and Dorothy Stoltz. The white paper was pivotal in broadening the conversation about librarians as media mentors within and outside the field.

As we discussed the idea of librarians as media mentors and defined what media mentorship meant, one question kept coming up: What does a media mentor look like? The need for media mentorship was obvious in the daily goings-on at any public library, in the news, and in discussions on electronic discussion lists and social media, but *how* to be a media mentor when those media were changing and continue to change at a rapid rate was less obvious for many. What was the best recipe for successful media mentorship? How do we continue to engage all families with information and literacy support? How do we connect family members with each other while using the latest media? As with chocolate chip cookies—whether homemade or bakery-bought, nut-full or nut-less, with dark or milk chocolate, gluten-free, or vegan—media mentors take the fundamentals and fiddle with the ingredients, finding success in different ways that are customized to their community's needs. Although the white paper helped identify a common understanding of the idea of media mentorship, *Becoming a Media Mentor,* written in collaboration with ALSC, aims to show youth services staff what media mentorship looks like and to empower each and every one of us to support families using the best ingredients and tools available. It's a cookbook of sorts and provides the recipes youth services staff need to cook up their own batch of media mentorship.

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Introduction

How to Use This Book

Becoming a Media Mentor is divided into two parts. Part I consists of seven chapters filled with background and supportive information important for media mentors. The chapters flow from research to practice. We've gathered expert insights on the topics important to mentoring kids, teens, and families and married them with the perspectives of practitioners. Chapters include discussion on research, diversity, management, working with families, professional development, and, finally, three ways to be a media mentor. Each chapter includes Voices from the Field—contributions from researchers, librarians, educators, and experts who believe in media mentorship and the role youth services staff can play.

Part II of the book features three types of media mentorship (discussed in chapter 7) with twelve specific examples from libraries across the United States. Urban and rural libraries are included, big and small budgets are represented, and simple and more complex initiatives and projects are shared. The examples of media advisory, programming, and access to high-quality, curated media involve apps, certainly, but also many other kinds of new and traditional media, because media mentorship is not just about apps. Apps are a relatively new format that has captured the attention of libraries and librarians,

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but they are not the only form of new media that families are consuming. Each inspirational mentorship recipe for success details the ingredients each mentor used to support kids, teens, and families, including information about target age group, media used, staff necessary, and associated costs.

There has been a significant early childhood focus in the discussion about children and technology, stemming partially from the American Academy of Pediatrics recommendations (past and present) and from notable work of organizations like the TEC (Technology in Early Childhood) Center at Erikson Institute and the Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children's Media at St. Vincent College. This book, however, goes farther. Libraries serve families from birth until death, and youth services staff play a key role in supporting children and teens ages 0 to 14. This book is written for anyone who works in a library with young people and their families—including children's librarians, library administrators and managers, and youth services staff. Nomenclature for this type of library practitioner varies from library to library, so for simplicity's sake this book mostly uses the phrase "youth services staff" to refer to anyone who serves in this capacity in a community, though other terms like "children's librarians" or "library staff" are used as well, depending on the context.

We hope this book will be a catalyst for conversation, innovation, and connection. Discussions about media mentorship and how to use research and our professional experience to support families must continue. So much of our work as youth services staff is guided by one common goal—to support the development of healthy relationships and lifelong learning among human beings. As media mentors we do just that with whatever media or technology is best.

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PART I

Becoming a Media Mentor

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1
What Is a Media Mentor?

The term "media mentorship" is a new one that has emerged with the prevalence of new, or digital, media, but the concept of supporting families is nothing new at all to children's librarians.

—Amy Koester

A mother and child walk into their community's small public library on a Saturday afternoon. The young child is excited to learn more about dinosaurs. As the duo enter the children's section of the library, they almost stumble into a family leaving the area with stacks of . . . dinosaur books. The mom immediately starts to worry that her future paleontologist, unaware that many of the books she might have wanted just left the building, will have to leave the library empty-handed. After all, how many books can the library have on dinosaurs?

Hesitantly, the mom approaches the children's librarian. She explains their mission and gets ready for the bad news—surely there are no dinosaur books left. The librarian, however, explains that although a family just checked out what the library had in the nonfiction section, there are some other options for the young dinosaur fan. With a sigh of relief, the mom looks at her daughter,

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whose grin widens. After a couple of questions, the librarian proceeds to share the other resources the library has, including *National Geographic Kids* magazines; kid-friendly, informational DVDs; a Smithsonian dinosaur app on the library's mounted iPad; links to age-appropriate and authoritative websites for kids that the two can explore on the library's computers or at home; books requested from another library that will take a few days to arrive; a dinosaur game that the two can borrow with their library card; and an upcoming visit by the dinosaur expert at the local museum. The mom takes a flyer about the program and a brochure about recommended apps for kids and heads off to explore the magazines with her daughter. An hour later they leave with a puzzle and plan to check out the suggested websites together at home.

In 2010, something happened that rapidly accelerated the evolution of the children's librarian's role—Apple launched the iPad. Before the iPad, helping families access information and supporting their literacy and media needs meant connecting them with paper books, a limited number of online resources, books on tape or CD, and movies. The iPad, and the many mobile digital devices that have followed it, has increased opportunities to support families with a variety of needs. Sometimes the library doesn't have exactly what a family needs or wants in the building, and digital content makes sense for that family. The deluge of apps, devices, and online resources, however, has brought with it additional challenges. With over eighty thousand *educational* apps for the iPad,[1] and new forms of media beyond apps emerging on the market, families struggle to identify which media are right for them, which ones are high quality, which support their child's or teen's literacy needs, and which work where and how families need them. Families need help. They need a media mentor.

YOUTH SERVICES STAFF AS MEDIA MENTORS

What *is* a media mentor? As the preceding story exemplifies, a media mentor supports the literacy, information, and media needs of children, teens, and their families. Media mentorship has long taken place in reference interviews in the form of recommendations from the library's curated collection, but the recent explosion of nonbook forms of media developed especially for children, and the widespread use of mobile digital media among young children and their families,[2] demands that library staff apply their traditional skills to new media (see the accompanying text box).

The pervasive need to help families navigate the "digital Wild West"[3] has been articulated clearly outside the library world. Lisa Guernsey, author and director of the Early Education Initiative and the Learning Technologies Project in the Education Policy Program at New America, specifically called on librarians to act as media mentors in her 2014 talk at TEDx MidAtlantic.[4]

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The term *new media* refers to all media that use text, sound, images, and video in a digital setting and can include e-books, apps, digital music, Makey Makeys, websites, robots, digital audiobooks, computer programs, paper circuits, movies, and more. The emphasis is on *new,* and media mentors will need to consider the latest examples of new media for inclusion in library collections, programs, and conversations with kids, teens, and their families as the technology evolves and new formats become available.

Again, in 2015, Guernsey, this time with coauthor Michael Levine, wrote in *Tap, Click, Read* that

> [m]edia mentors . . . can lessen frustration, help children find more engaging materials, prompt teachers and childcare providers to be more selective about materials, and give parents some encouragement to see themselves as part of their children's learning. They could be valuable partners for media developers as well. . . . Wouldn't coping with the avalanche of technology be easier and less stressful if those of us raising and working with children had a guide with this kind of expertise at our side?[5]

Individual librarians and library staff across the United States and Canada answered with a resounding yes, and the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) commissioned and adopted a white paper entitled *Media Mentorship in Libraries Serving Youth* (2015) to help guide the youth services profession.

Key positions from *Media Mentorship in Libraries Serving Youth* (see appendix A):

1. Every library has librarians and other staff serving youth who embrace their role as media mentors for their community.
2. Media mentors support children and families in their media use and decisions.
3. Library schools provide resources and training to support future librarians and youth services practitioners in serving as media mentors.
4. Professional development for current librarians and youth services practitioners includes formal training and informal support for serving as media mentors.

SOURCE: Cen Campbell, Claudia Haines, Amy Koester, and Dorothy Stoltz, *Media Mentorship in Libraries Serving Youth* (Chicago: Association for Library Service to Children, 2015).

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ALSC WHITE PAPER

The ALSC white paper was written to unify youth services staff in their definition of what it means to be a media mentor and to offer ideological guidance on how to move forward and reenvision the role of the children's librarian. As with other professional initiatives such as Every Child Ready to Read @ your library, media mentorship is based on the most recent media research and policy work by respected pioneers. Experts from the Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children's Media, Common Sense Media, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), and Zero to Three, as well as individuals such as Lisa Guernsey, Michael Levine, Michael Robb, Chip Donohue, and Susan B. Neuman, support the case for media mentorship in libraries. The white paper brings together the research highlights and applies them to today's library landscape, in many cases for the first time.

A media mentor

- Supports children, teens, and families in their media decisions and practices relating to media use
- Has access to and shares recommendations for and research on children's and teens' media use

The paper also recommends that library directors and managers as well as library school professors support youth services staff in their roles as media mentors. Guidance in the white paper as well as support from management and professional development providers is crucial because as Lisa Guernsey and Michael Levine, director at the Joan Ganz Cooney Center, recently stated, "Librarians will become more necessary, not less, in the digital age."[6]

Since the publication of the white paper in 2015, research, professional competencies, and key positions on new media use have already evolved, further demonstrating the need for youth services staff to stay abreast of changes to the new media landscape as it matures. The rapid changes happening within the world of new media require youth services staff not only to encourage lifelong learning among families but also to be lifelong learners themselves.

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Voice from the Field

Carisa Kluver

Carisa Kluver is founder of the blog *The Digital Media Diet* and Digital -Storytime.com, a children's app review website. Kluver has been a media mentor to the field of librarianship since 2010 and has conducted workshops and trainings with Cen Campbell around the country, supporting youth services staff to see themselves as media mentors.

Librarianship is making great strides to come into its own with new media, but there is still a long road ahead. I see librarians in my local library working hard to recommend titles from new media, although it's a struggle. Print is still the format of choice by most librarians I meet, despite a large variety of mediums available within the public library.

Children occupy so many different environments within our society that we have to consider their media use across all spaces to achieve a healthy balance. This is most difficult for those of us who see kids in just one space. Ultimately parents and families are the only ones to be the overall managers of "screen time" for kids, just as they are the overseers for every child's overall educational experience. As parents, we may "delegate" this responsibility to schools for many hours of the day, but we can never expect the schools or other programs to monitor this new media use for our own children completely since they spend four to five times as many waking hours with us compared to with school (8,765 hours in a year; 1,000 average school hours; 5,000 average waking hours—assuming ten hours asleep per day; see www.centerforpubliceducation.org/Main-Menu/Organizing-a-school/Time-in-school-How-does-the-US-compare).

These facts about time illustrate that the only way to support families is to empower them as the primary educators, curators, and monitors of their children's education. It may seem extreme to say, but every waking hour is precious for children's growth and development. This means that families have the honor of being their child's first and best teacher and need to be reminded of this early and often. Starting off well can mean a world of difference, so children's librarians should focus most on the early years, before school especially. These are both high-impact years in a child's life and a time families are open to early intervention.

In later years, elementary- and secondary-school-age kids can be reached as well through library programs. At this point librarians should understand that families have varying needs. Some families will need support with English language learning (ELL) or learning disabilities as their children matriculate into the school system. Other families will want help challenging their gifted children or working on specific subject areas of interest. But most families will simply need to be supported in their efforts to scaffold their children's learning for simple school proficiency.

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NEW TERM, OLD ROLE

Media mentorship is a new term referring to an old role that librarians have been playing for a long time. But the term also reflects a new way of thinking. No longer are librarians the experts on a single format (books). Library staff are now the connectors—the link between families and information in whatever format they need. Those formats may be paper books, audiobooks, and apps today, but what about a year from now? What will be the best of the new media or latest technology to support early literacy, struggling readers, or aspiring engineers? Librarians and youth services staff are already experienced and qualified mentors, but the real question is, will librarians continue to be the trusted source for families' media and literacy needs, in all their forms? For media mentors, the answer is yes.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

DigitalMediaDiet.com

Digital-Storytime.com

Diversity Programming for Digital Youth: Promoting Cultural Competence in the Children's Library by Jamie Campbell Naidoo

"How the iPad Affects Young Children, and What We Can Do about It" by Lisa Guernsey

Tap, Click, Read: Growing Readers in a World of Screens by Lisa Guernsey and Michael Levine

NOTES

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5. Lisa Guernsey and Michael Levine, *Tap, Click, Read: Growing Readers in a World of Screens* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2015), 193.
6. Henry Jenkins, "*Tap, Click, Read: An Interview with Lisa Guernsey and Michael Levine (Part Three),*" October 27, 2015, http://henryjenkins.org/2015/10/tap-click-read-an-interview-with-lisa-guernsey-and-michael-levine-part-three.html.

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