University of Wisconsin-Madison, Drexel University, and University of Oklahoma

Navigating Screens: Libraries as Community Hubs for Teaching Positive Screen Media Practices

The University of Wisconsin-Madison (lead institution), Drexel University, and the University of Oklahoma propose to investigate the needs of parents and caregivers for elementary school-aged children in relation to information concerning children and screen media. "Navigating Screens" will develop guidelines for libraries to work collaboratively with community organizations to deliver model family education programs for teaching children and families to be savvy screen media users. This program, which will empower libraries as community technology educators, will run from October 2017 to September 2020.

We are requesting $480,360 to work with parents, librarians, and other professionals in providing information about parenting and screen media. The research questions address: 1) parents' and caregivers' needs and experiences of advice around parenting and screen media; 2) advice and guidance from community organizations where information is being provided such as health organizations, schools, and police departments as well as online spaces mentioned by parents; and 3) the role of public libraries as community hubs for gathering, mediating, and supplementing this information.

Statement of National Need Today's parents and other caregivers are often called upon to serve as technology educators and role models for their children. Rarely, however, do caregivers have formal training in teaching children best practices for screen media use. Instead, they must rely on information they receive from others in their communities, such as physicians, police officers, youth group leaders, and more. Web-based sources, such as government and private agency websites, as well as popular media are also common sources of information for adults who wish to learn about guiding children in the use of screen media. Unfortunately, these sources frequently frame children's use of screen media as entirely negative, ignoring any possible benefits of use. Benefits can include technology skills acquisition, positive social interaction, and the joy of play. For example, playing video games can help children develop various transferable skills, including problem solving, spatial awareness, communication, and higher level thinking (Connolly et al., 2012). Interactive e-books and apps can promote children's literacy development (Agosto, 2012). Further, online activities are discussed as part of a participatory culture in which embedded forms of learning involve community members working collaboratively, sharing information, and creating new texts (Jenkins et al., 2007).

In contrast, caregivers' common sources for information about children and screen media tend to emphasize possible negative aspects of use, including physical and mental health issues such as obesity, addiction, and increase in aggression (Brody, 2015). Online spaces for children are surrounded by concerns about high profile internet risks, such as cyberbullying, "stranger danger" and exposure to violent and pornographic content (Hasebrink et al., 2009), and as a result, parents and other caregivers are warned about negative effects of too much screen time without receiving balanced discussion of possible educational benefits. As families increasingly incorporate digital technologies into households, they are surrounded by these competing discourses, and parents are often worried about their children's technology use and how best to guide and regulate that use (Hiniker, Schoenbeck, & Kientz, 2016).

Recent publications concerning "media mentorship" provide ample evidence that parents and caregivers are looking to libraries for support and guidance regarding family practices surrounding digital technologies (Haimes, Campbell, and ALSC, 2016). These authors argue for the need for librarians to model positive uses and experiences with media. Although many schools provide education about technologies, and parents are given advice about screen time from pediatricians and "net safety" information from police, often the content and delivery methods are couched in negative terms that discourage discussion and do not align with family practices (Agosto & Abbas, 2015; Willett, 2016). All of these media messages leave caregivers unprepared for mentoring and modeling healthy screen media use for children, and there exists a critical need for communities to have a hub where families can receive positive guidance and modeling on navigating the plethora of information available about children and screen media. Libraries are perfectly positioned to play the role of community screen media educators, working with families and community groups to help parents and other caregivers raise happy, healthy young screen media users and savvy future digital citizens.

Project Design Our research questions are as follows:

1. What sources of information do parents and caregivers draw on to understand and make decisions about domestic practices concerning children and screen media?

2. In what ways do parents accept, reject, or negotiate guidance concerning parenting and screen media as presented in sources of information they draw on?

3. In what ways are organizations in communities providing and mediating information about parenting practices concerning children and screen media?

4. What roles can public libraries play in helping parents and caregivers to understand, negotiate, and supplement this information?

The project involves six case studies in three areas of the US: Wisconsin, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania. The research sites in these three states together represent metropolitan, micropolitan, and rural populations (two sites in each state). This number and range of community sites is necessary to provide us with enough data to make some generalizations about some findings, while also being able to speak to the specificity of particular contexts. The following libraries have tentatively agreed to take part in the project: Madison Public Library (Madison, WI), Eager Free Library (Evansville, WI), Metropolitan Library System (Oklahoma City, OK), Tulsa City County Library System (Tulsa, OK) and the Free Library of Philadelphia (PA). These libraries have strong connections with local community organizations such as schools and Boys and Girls Clubs.

The project involves two phases: 1) gathering and analyzing data about information parents and caregivers access and how they understand and apply that information; and 2) using data from phase 1 to work with libraries to develop services that meet the needs of parents and caregivers (including collaborations with organizations in the community that currently provide these services). Phase 1 involves 1) semi-structured interviews with parents/caregivers (both library and non-library users), 2) semi-structured interviews with representatives from organizations that currently provide information about parenting and screen media (e.g. libraries, schools, police departments, pediatricians, after-school care organizations), and 3) analysis of documents and websites cited by parents as sources of screen media use information. After analyzing data from Phase 1, Phase 2 involves presenting findings to libraries and potential partner organizations, collaboratively developing and implementing services that respond to these findings, and finally assessing these new services to see if they meet the needs of community members.

National Impact The research will result in 1) a replicable model for assessing information resources and parental needs concerning children and screen media, and 2) a model for public libraries to collaborate with local community organizations to identify and address the needs of parents and caregivers. Dissemination will focus on professional outlets such as webinars, practice-oriented conferences, workshops, and professional publications (minimum of one each: webinar, article in practice-oriented journal, ALA workshop, ALA conference presentation, local library conference presentation, library educators' conference presentation).

Schedule of Completion and Budget Phase 1 of the project will last 18 months and will involve operationalizing the research questions, applying for institutional review board approval, conducting an environmental scan for information, conducting interviews, and preliminary data analysis. Phase 2 of the project will last 12 months and will involve further data analysis and work with libraries and partner organizations to develop, deliver, and assess family education programs for teaching children how to be savvy screen media users. The budget includes $123,337 for salaries and fringe benefits for one month summer salary per year for each of the three co-PIs; $199,537 for salaries, fringe benefits, and tuition remission for one graduate student assistant at each university for 18 months; $8770 for travel, food, accommodation, and conference fees ($2760 for two project meetings; $4540 for nationwide conferences; $1470 for local library conferences); $9000 for research expenses (e.g. participant incentives, transcription fees, equipment, NVivo licenses); $12,000 to cover additional expenses for six library partners (e.g. program support, apps, catering, printing); and indirect costs of $64,160.