

Early Literacy Services in a Digital Age

By Libby McKeever.

Cen Campbell, Francesca de Freitas and Tess Prendergast presented Early Literacy Services in a Digital Age at the 2013 BC Library Conference.

Introduction

This session was presented by three children's librarians who have a keen interest in early literacy and the possibilities of digital learning tools. Francesca de Freitas is a Children's Librarian at Vancouver Public Library and has a background in web developing. Tess Prendergast is a children's librarian and PhD student in Vancouver, BC. Her academic research investigates all aspects of early literacy in the lives of children with disabilities. Cen Campbell is a children's librarian and editor of LittleeLit.com, a media literacy resources and consultancy service. Cen is currently serving on the ALSC Children and Technology Committee and works at the City of Mountain View Public Library and Santa Clara County Library District in Silicon Valley.

Screen Time

Tess Prendergast described early literacy in the digital age as both "treacherous and exhilarating." She suggested that as practitioners, our job of navigating this ambiguous territory is hampered by the lack of research in early literacy performed in a library setting. According to Prendergast, commonly held beliefs around screen time were propagated by the American Academy of Pediatrics. She prefers to look to [NAEYC](#) (National Association for the Education of Young Children), who suggest screen time should "[lead] to social interactions with ... babies and toddlers, instead of replacing those interactions." Ms. Prendergast believes there's a disconnection in our practice in libraries as we've tended to borrow wholesale from education research. She sees a need for modern studies in digital early literacy tools and practices, resulting in the provision of a range of services that support the whole child.

Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR)

Fostering a culture of reading and learning to tell stories is important to Francesca de Freitas. Based on the five tenets of ECRR, Francesca demonstrated how to incorporate "together" activities of talking, singing,

reading, writing and playing via early literacy apps that parents can use with their children.

Early Digital Literacy in Practice

Cen Campbell demonstrated a lively digital story time using familiar stories that have been transformed into apps. She proposes that in an age where being multi-literate is the norm and will prove crucial for future success, we now need to integrate this message into our practice. We can do this by:

- Demonstrating to parents how to use technology with their children
- Sourcing educational apps suitable for young children
- Developing programming that combines both analog and digital medias



Cen Campbell displaying analog and digital storytelling at her Choo Choo Pyjama Story Time. Photo by Scott Mattes.

Conclusion

There is pressure on parents. They don't want their child to be left behind and they want to make the right choices. These speakers encourage children's services practitioners to educate themselves and incorporate digital literacy messages into all aspects of their work.

Resources for Early Literacy in Digital Media

[Little eLit](#) is a resource blog that reviews apps and eBooks for children aged 2-5. It also provides

programming ideas to help with incorporating digital media into literacy programs.

[ALSC blog](#) is a resource for discussion and programming suggestions.

Libby McKeever is the Youth Services Librarian at the Whistler Public Library, in Whistler British Columbia.