

Teens and Technology: How to Turn a Passion into a Career

By Lisa McNiven

Increased funding and programming for technology in the library system can be advantageous for teens who do not have access to software and programs at home. Efforts to engage teens in technology will help bridge the digital divide between high-income and low-income teens and encourage teens to pursue careers in related fields, such as digital animation.

Through technology there is potential to make a connection with typically hard-to-reach teens in the library environment. Using computer classes and tutorials as a service for these patrons we as librarians can offer teens an opportunity to expand their knowledge of computer literacy and skill. In supporting technology and providing resources that may not be available to teens with limited income or resources we are offering teens a chance to succeed academically and potentially secure a stable financial future.

This brief discussion will centre on applied arts and technology, with an emphasis on animation. Animation is a focus for Halifax, Nova Scotia because the region is not typically regarded as a technology base but the number of local schools and colleges in the vicinity are producing talented artists and animators. There are five local animation studios, as well as one in Lunenburg, that hire recent graduates, these include the Academy of Learning, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and the Nova Scotia Community College with a campus in Truro. The future students of these schools first come through the public education system, and along their journey, librarians can encourage and support their creative choices. As librarians, we need to be proactive in teen programming and in some cases we can fill the void that public schools have created due to lack of funding. As professor David Shaffer, author and

gaming scientist, (2008) points out, “We live in a time of economic change, but our schools are busy preparing students for the commodity jobs of the past – jobs that will be long gone by the time they finish school.” (p.4)

Education Choices and Teens

While libraries may use technology to reach out to teens of both genders, males – especially those reluctant readers – may be more attracted to library services through technology-related and career-oriented programming. For teens that are not academically inclined, the prospect of a career in a tech-related field may motivate them to stay in school and stay engaged with the hope of continuing their education in a venue such as a community college. Kelly Czartnecki (2011), a gaming columnist for *School Library Journal*, points out that some students will elect to spend hours playing video games at the library, so librarians may naturally play a very important role in introducing students to a possible career in gaming.

Engaging teens in a literacy/library environment can be a challenge but playing with new software programs and emerging technologies could make learning more

appealing. These positive outcomes could make a case for promoting education via technology in the library as an education goal. Researchers Bell and Bezanson, (2006) have studied the role of educators in influencing teens and their education choices. They conclude that career development services (broadly defined) can reduce the high school drop-out rate, especially for disadvantaged youth; “At age 15, 77.8% understand that a post secondary education is required to reach their career goal. At age 17, the percentage increases to 18.8%” (p.54). These numbers indicate that teachers, librarians, and other adult role models are very important educational influences at this age.

Why Technology?

Libraries already provide basic technology services, such as computers and word-processing programs. However, it would be a great investment for librarians to look into open source options for digital animation software, or if the budget exists, invest in a well-regarded program, such as Adobe Creative Suite. The challenge of getting a population of reluctant readers into the library can be solved by promoting something that does not outwardly look like

a learning resource. The role of the librarian would be as a mentor or facilitator. As Braun (2003) mentions in her book *Technically Involved*, “teen interest in technology gives librarians a fantastic opportunity to involve people who are not typically library users. One can't argue with a service that brings a whole new group of users into the library and shows them that the library is a valuable part of the community” (p.5). By this assessment, library mentorship can be just as valuable for the library as for the teens it benefits.

Library Setting

The library is an ideal place for teens to meet, as the environment can create a specific space for teens in the community. This can enhance a sense of collaboration and participation, and may teach teens responsibility through group meetings, projects, and networking. Teens will learn how to constructively use time, commit to group agendas and gain empowerment through service to other people. The library is a forum and the teens, both as patrons and volunteers, can benefit from this partnership. Libraries can be instrumental in providing forums such as tutorials and programs that can teach teens to be active members in the

digital and technological function of the library. Examples of their involvement could include blogs or online book reviews, which also could be done in a video format. Teens could create an online story time selection (on-demand videos) for a younger audience and build community outreach pages. As part of the learning process and experience, weekly meetings could be implemented; however, be realistic in the time commitments of teenagers and be specific in what their duties are.

Providing teens with community outreach opportunities and job experience is a win/win situation, because students get potential job information, and schools and animation studios get good PR by providing a public service. Schools can scout potential students, and studios can start headhunting. Libraries can list these partners on their website, and provide links to the organization, which would lead to good relations between the library and its fundraising partners, causing more technologically-related firms to want to partner with the library.

Outline for an in-house Project for Teens

- Have local animation studios and colleges/universities present to the students
- Take students on tour of college campuses and labs, or have professors come to the library
- Set up a job shadowing programming
- Ask institutions to run a workshop on a specific subject related to a project (eg. uploading video feeds).
- Skype sessions for visiting authors
- Create On-Demand Story Time Sessions
- Have the teens do a background search on what makes a story time for children fun. Check out other story time sites online.
- Try setting up web based story time sessions that can be set as episodes and accessed through the library children's page.
- Ask the youth services staff and local daycare workers what kids like to read. Make sure you target proper development factors for the age group you have chosen.
- Make sure you have the right audio and video technology to record.
- Create a policy and a code of conduct for the teens involved; no inappropriate language or story lines.
- If you are doing plays or puppet shows, then adapt or create new material.
- Develop and design the site. Get one of the teens to design graphic art for logos or backdrops.
- Prepare and upload the site to a server, such as YouTube.
- Advertise on the library site under both the children's and adult pages. Let visiting daycares know that you are doing this. However, you cannot have children as part of the filmed audience due to confidentiality clauses to protect their privacy.
- Evaluate and keep track of progress by recording the number of views and hits and viewer responses.

The private and accredited art and animation colleges in Halifax can offer local teens an opportunity to enrol and study within their community. According to information from the Nova Scotia Community College Animation Program, one-third of their students are under 20 years of age, so job experience garnered as teens would be immediately relevant for those applying to

technology-related programs. According to a Halifax report, there are over 400 jobs in animation within the five studios, and this does not include seasonal and short term projects (Morawetz, 2005). Another report is a follow up on a 2009 survey of Nova Scotia Community College graduates of Applied Arts and New Media. Of the 105 students surveyed 84% were employed within a year and 65% were employed in the field they studied. The average salary of these graduates was \$36,171 per year. (NSCC, 2010)

As Librarians we can help close the digital divide for students who may not access to technology based information. Librarians can act as mentors and facilitators by creating applicable projects for students to fine-tune their skills on. Getting practical volunteer experience is very difficult for teens but the library can make the transition easier by setting up student supported library projects. This volunteer experience will show up on their college applications and resumes and give them an extra step towards a career in media arts or technology.

Book Review:

Technically Involved: Technology-based youth participation activities for your library.

Linda W. Braun

The challenge for most librarians involved in teen programming is not, “will they come?”, but “what do I do once they are here?” Motivating and organizing are big tasks, so therefore, there is a need for a well-laid plan of action. In creating technology-based clubs and curricula, the librarian must be aware of the needs of the teens and what can be accomplished within the settings of the library.

Technically Involved is a great guide for practical plans in getting teens organized and creating youth projects that are both fun and an asset to the library and its patrons. The chapters include topics such as “Getting teens involved,” “Reading, Writing and Youth Participation” and “Overcoming Obstacles.” The chapters are well organized and walk the reader through every step on how to create teen/tech programs. The author defines why each project is important and provides strategies that will support the teens, such as motivation and group participation. There is a check list of what responsibilities are involved, who has them, and whether they will be achieved on site or at a remote location. One example project given is designing a subscription form for an e-newsletter. For this project, there are fifteen steps to follow, and every task also has a diagram, indicating the relative roles of teen volunteers and librarian mentors. This is a good guide to help the mentor know when to step back and when to intervene and help.

This book is very comprehensive and hands-on with diagrams and laid-out lesson plans. I would recommend it for librarians who are starting a new project, as this would be a good base to build on.

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