Chapter Six:
New Media in Storytimes: Strategies for Using Tablets in a Program Setting

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When libraries and their staff make the decision to mindfully integrate tablet technology into their toolbox of storytime supplies, it can be overwhelming to consider the myriad strategies in which a storytime provider might wield the technology within a program. This chapter seeks to provide detailed examples of ways in which tablet technology may be used in storytimes, including methods of sharing devices with a group and the functions a device can serve in the program setting. Two sample preschool storytime plans that incorporate new media elements will be shared in the appendix of this completed book.

Sharing Tablet Technology with a Group

The logistics of using a tablet in storytime depend largely upon the technology equipment available to the library. What equipment is available for use in projecting or sharing the contents of a tablet with the group? Another significant consideration in determining the appropriate tablet-sharing method for storytime is the size of the storytime group; the size of the storytime facility; and the age of the storytime attendees.

Single Tablet

One simple way to integrate apps and ebooks into storytime is to hold the tablet facing the audience in the same manner one would hold a print book. The librarian would do the swiping and tapping as he or she guides the audience through the app or ebook. Due to the relatively small size of a tablet, this method works best for sharing with small groups (approximately 20 people or less). The benefit to this method of using a tablet in a storytime setting is that, beyond the tablet itself, it requires no other equipment or technical knowledge. For those librarians who do not have experience integrating technology into their storytimes, simply holding the tablet for all to see is a wonderful introduction and will allow the practitioner to build up confidence.

Projecting a Tablet

If the library already owns a projector, it is relatively simple to project the iPad screen onto the wall or projector screen. The method with the smallest investment of time and technological knowledge

involves purchasing a VGA to iPad adapter (usually Apple branded), or the equivalent for Android devices. Locate the VGA cable on the projector, connect the purchased adapter to the cord, then plug the iPad into the adapter. This method allows the tablet's screen to be projected onto a wall or white screen, which results in a larger viewing size. This method can be useful for storytime groups of any size, but is particularly well suited to large groups.

Potential limitations do exist when using a projector to display the contents of the tablet's screen. Because the tablet is physically connected to the projector by cords, the storytime leader's movements are limited by the length and weight of the VGA cable. Additionally, the connectors can be unreliable; it is worth the library's time to research what connectors will work best for their storytime setup. It is recommended to bring staff in the information technology department, or other staff most familiar with the library's projection technology, into this conversation. It is also worth spending money on high-quality connectors to ensure ease of use and reliability.

A final limitation is that not all apps that are loaded on a tablet will be compatible with VGA projection. There may be certain apps, or certain aspects of apps, that simply will not project in this method. It is advised that the storytime provider take steps to ensure that desired apps can be projected using this method.

Mirroring a Tablet to a Television

Mirroring a tablet to a television is another way to enlarge the viewing size of a the tablet screen. This method allows the storytime provider to use the tablet with a large group. There are two ways to mirror a tablet to television. One method involves using an HDMI cable and an appropriate iPad adaptor (or Android equivalent for Android devices) to connect the two devices. i.e., the television and the tablet. This arrangement allows the librarian to display the tablet screen onto the larger television screen. Since the tablet is connected to the television via a cable, the storytime leader is limited as to how much he or she can move around the room while still using the tablet.

The second method allows the librarian to wirelessly mirror the tablet screen to the television. This method gives the storytime leader full freedom to move around the room while still using the tablet. To achieve this method, the librarian will need a stable and secure wireless internet (wifi) connection, an Apple TV (or similar streaming device, such as a Google Chromecast), and a tablet. Both the Apple TV and the tablet must be connected to the same wifi network. For those storytime leaders who do not have access to a stable wifi connection, another option would be to use a cellphone as a personal hotspot or to purchase a wireless media hub. Once both devices are connected to the wifi network, the storytime leaders can simply turn on "mirroring" within the tablet's settings.

Fleet of Tablets

Libraries with the purchasing resources and storage facilities may consider using a fleet of tablets for storytime. This use for storytime allows each attending child

and caregiver to share a tablet during the program. The child and caregiver can engage with book apps one on one, exploring stories together at their own pace.

To prepare a fleet of tablets for use in storytime, the tablets should be loaded with a selection of ebooks and book apps. Apps can be chosen to connect to storytime themes, to promote specific early literacy practices, or to meet other specific storytime goals. The storytime provider can direct how and for how long children and caregivers will enjoy tablet sharing time. For example, each pair can be instructed to share a specific app. Alternately, the storytime provider can give instructions for use with any app; e.g., "Choose a book app to share and talk about what's happening on the screen"; "Choose an app to share and say new vocabulary words out loud together"; or "Before moving to a new page in the app of your choice, ask your child what they think will happen next."

Sharing stories and interactive games through a fleet of storytime tablets allows children and caregivers to engage jointly in the media. Joint media engagement is key for using any material together, whether book or tablet; when child and caregiver share tablet time in storytime, the storytime provider can model and give tips on joint media engagement in the context of the program.

Libraries using a fleet of tablets may consider a variety of supplies to use with the storytime tablets. One possible supplementary purchase is protective cases for each device; libraries can choose the style of protective case that will provide the desired level of physical security while the tablets are being used by storytime attendees. Another supplementary purchase is headphones and headphone jack splitters; when a splitter is used, two pairs of headphones can be used on a single device, allowing both the child and caregiver to enjoy the sound of the book apps without creating a large amount of noise in the storytime room. If headphones are used, the library should maintain a plan for sanitizing headphones after use in programs.

Additionally, since the tablets in a fleet will be used directly by library customers, each device should have password-protected security provisions in place. Library staff can determine the appropriate level of security needed for the devices. Essentially, these security restrictions will prevent any changes being made to the devices during use in the program, from purchase or deletion of apps to internet access to in-app purchases. Such restrictions can ensure that the storytime provider maintains control over the content on the tablets.

Tablet as Storytime Tool

Whether the storytime provider uses a tablet as a hand-held device or mirrors the tablet to a projector or television, there are many different ways apps can be used in storytime. All strategies discussed in this chapter are meant to supplement and/or enhance—never replace—successful traditional storytime elements. Beyond reading book apps or ebooks from the tablet, apps can be used as games, conversation starters, and ultimately opportunities for active engagement. Just as we sing songs, use puppets, or do flannel boards in storytime, there are a variety of wonderful apps that can be included in

the librarian's bag of storytime tricks.

Tablet as Book

One of the most traditional ways to incorporate apps into storytime is to use a book that has been turned into an app, or story apps created specifically for use on tablets. In the same way that librarians have been using flannelboards, big books, puppets, and other non-standard books to enhance the literacy experience for years, book apps are another platform to share and interpret the written word. The interactive elements can be likened to the moving parts of pop-up books.

Selecting a Book App

Librarians searching for book apps to coordinate with a particular storytime theme may start in the iTunes App Store or Google Play Store using a keyword search. If the selection is too vast or too sparse, there are a number of online resources that post reviews of apps. One reliable source, especially for book apps, is www.digital-storytime.com. This website is curated by one of the co-authors of chapter five of this book, Carisa Kluver, and the site focuses on books apps for children. Digital Storytime includes hundreds of reviews of book apps, and reviews include qualities that will affect the usability of an app in a storytime setting, such as audio quality, animation, interactivity, and re-readability. This and other review sources make it so storytime practitioners do not have to sift through lots inappropriate apps just to find a handful that will work for storytime.

The selection of book app titles is not yet anywhere near as vast as the selection of print books. Some of the book apps available on the market are translated from print books, while others are original stories written expressly for the app. These original stories are similar to self-published print books. Just as in the world of print, many self-published titles may be less polished than those that go through the traditional publication process. As a practitioner chooses an app to use in storytime, he or she should still apply the same criteria to books that will be read on a tablet as they would to print books (see Chapter Five for a full exploration of evaluation criteria). If the text is poorly written, or the illustrations are unattractive and would not be presented if it were a hardcopy picture book, consider carefully whether the book app is worth sharing with storytime patrons.

Presenting the Book App

Storytime providers should be sure to spend some time with their storytime book apps before sharing them in front of the group. This practice ensures that practitioners know where all the moving parts are, whether a book has any unanticipated surprises, and how long the book will take to read. Whenever possible, it is advised that the storytime leader choose the "read it myself" option or, if that is not possible, mute the device by turning the volume all the way down. This strategy allows the storytime leader to use the book app at his or her desired pace.

If the app will be projected onto a screen, the recommended procedure is to stand up beside the screen and watch the same screen that the audience is watching as much as possible (rather than watching the small tablet screen). Of course, the librarian will have to look

at the device to turn pages or to activate some of the motions, but those actions should be kept brief and the majority of eye contact should be with the projected image or the audience. As a result everyone in the room will be looking at the same output and adjustments can be made if necessary.

Other than these minor considerations, reading an app during storytime is quite similar to reading a book. The librarian should still engage the group with questions and comments as the app is read. If, while previewing the app, the moving bits of the book prove to be a distraction rather than an enhancement of the text, simply leave them out and read the book straight through during storytime.

Tablet as Audience Participation Element

Another way to incorporate apps into storytime is through pretend play as a group. The best apps for this purpose allow children to help the storytime leader choose how to build or do something. To facilitate this sort of app sharing with the group, start with a quick verbal introduction to the basic concept of the app, then ask the group to shout out their choices (e.g., "Should we choose a round box or a square one?"). The librarian may choose to use the loudest or calmest suggestion or could ask for a show of hands to provide a quieter atmosphere. Once all the choices have been made, demonstrate most of the salient features of the app (e.g., "You can incorporate your own photos into the app as background or texture."). Then, if there is related gameplay, the librarian can play through one or two rounds, then choose whether

or not to invite children and their caregivers to jointly use the app on the librarian's tablet when storytime is over.

Tablet as Story Extender or Activity

The tablet can be loaded with apps that allow the storytime practitioner to extend stories shared in the program setting, usually through talking and other interactive practices. Talking is one of the five practices outlined in the 2nd Edition of Every Child Ready to Read® @ your library® as a way to develop early literacy skills. Using tablets with children as a story extender or activity is an effective way to promote conversation and increase vocabulary amongst the children in storytime. It also provides the librarian an opportunity to model, to the adults in the room, best practices for sharing digital media with children. Ideal apps for this use will require a lot of conversation.

Tablet as Song Sheet

Storytime providers may find it preferable to use the tablet in place of printed song sheets and signs. Using a tablet and app to display song and rhyme lyrics saves paper—the library does not need to print and make copies of rhyme sheets for all program attendees. Additionally, by projecting rhymes and lyrics onto a wall/screen or mirroring them onto a television, it is generally easier for typical attendees to see the lyrics during the program. This strategy is particularly useful in baby and toddler programs, where the children may grab or become distracted by paper handouts, prohibiting caregivers from reading or singing along in the program.

Two types of apps are recommended for creating and sharing song sheets on a tablet. The first is a slideshow app like Keynote on iOS or Powerpoint on Android platforms. In these slideshow apps, the storytime provider can type the relevant lyrics on an individual slide, which will then be displayed during the storytime program. Multiple rhymes can be entered onto multiple slides, and the slides can be arranged to reflect the order they'll be used in the program. Slides can be reused in multiple programs, and they can be shared with storytime families who want a reference for use at home.

A second app for creating and displaying song lyrics is Evernote. This free app requires the user to create and log in to an Evernote account, which is also free. Evernote allows users to create notes, which can be tagged with keywords and sorted into notebooks to allow for easy sorting and searching. Essentially, the user can create an entire library of songs and rhymes used in storytime by typing the lyrics into individual notes. When a particular song or rhyme is desired for a program, its note is called up and projected when needed. Storytime providers can access all needed songs and rhymes in the context of a single program by pulling up individual notes. This app is also linked to a web-based interface, so a user can log in online to create and edit individual song and rhyme notes. Updates and additions will be synced to the app when the tablet is connected to the internet.

Tablet as Flannel Board

The tablet can function as a flannel board tool. Based on reviews and testimonials of storytime providers, the most popular flannel board apps are two from Software Smoothie: Felt Board (evaluated in Chapter Five) and Felt Board - Mother Goose on the Loose (evaluated in the appendix of this completed book).

The Felt Board app allows for plenty of customization on the part of the user. The user can select the desired felt background, create diverse people dressed in a wide range of clothes and costumes, and insert scenery and objects that feature in many traditional folk and fairy tales and children's rhymes. For example, the user can create a digital flannel story to go with "Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed" or "The Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly."

The storytime provider can use this app in a number of ways. It can be used in real time, with objects and props in the story being added and removed as the script necessitates. It can be used as a group activity, with children interacting with the storytime provider to decide what elements will be added or removed from the story as it is being told. It can also be used in a more rigid arrangement, in which the story is told through a series of flannel scenes that are captured using the app's camera function or the tablet's screenshot function. These images of static scenes can be loaded into a slideshow on the device and projected in a desired order during the storytime.

The Felt Board - Mother Goose on the Loose app is specifically designed to work with Dr. Betsy Diamant-Cohen's Mother Goose on the Loose program for young children. The app contains props to visually "tell" a number of common

children's nursery rhymes, like Little Miss Muffet and the Itsy Bitsy Spider. This app also includes musical and vocal accompaniment, allowing the storytime provider to share the words and tune to these Mother Goose rhymes with everyone in the storytime program. Many of the rhymes include Spanish-language versions. This app can be used to present nursery rhymes in real time, but it can also be used for free play as children create stories of characters from different rhymes interacting with one another.

Tablet as Puppet Show

The Sock Puppets app allows storytime providers to integrate some basic puppetry into storytime without requiring physical puppets or puppetry expertise. The app allows the user to select one or more sock puppet figures, then record speech for each of the puppets. The tone and pitch of the recorded speeches are altered, so the puppets deliver their speeches in an amusing way.

This app can be used to create pre-made introductions to storytimes or storytime activities. For example, at least one library has used the app to record their storytime rules, which are shared at the beginning of each storytime.

The app can also be used in storytime to create brief, silly puppet shows with attendees. Children can recreate key phrases from stories and rhymes using the sock puppets, creating an engaging and memorable storytime experience.

Tablet as Free Play Time

Tablets can serve as a tool for free play in storytime, especially with a fleet of tablets as outlined earlier in this chapter.

To use tablets for free play, the device should be loaded with library-selected apps that offer opportunities for interactivity and joint engagement for both child and caregiver. Ideally, apps used for free play will be open-ended, or at least self-paced. The goal for using apps as a play option is to allow children to decide how they want to use the app —to create stories, to make silly creatures, to complete puzzles, etc. Apps for free play should allow children to explore and create as opposed to passively consume media.

Tablet as Opportunity for Joint Media Engagement

The term "joint media engagement," coined by the Joan Ganz Cooney Center (Takeuchi & Stevens, 2011), is used to describe the practice of people learning *together* through the use of media. As media mentors, librarians can and should use the opportunities that storytime provides to model to caregivers what appropriate joint media engagement involves. This can be done using any of the methods discussed in this chapter, but the librarian should make deliberate choices about what apps are included in storytime and how they are used. For instance, as the storytime leader uses the Felt Board - Mother Goose on the Loose app, he or she should interact with the children by asking questions, pointing out details on the screen, and requesting that the children sing along to the nursery rhymes.

Conclusion

Whether the librarian mirrors a tablet to a large screen or provides a fleet of tablets during storytime, he or she is

creating opportunities for joint media engagement with the children and opening up a dialogue with caregivers about positive media use. Without exception, all use of new media in storytime settings should promote joint engagement between young children and a caregiver—be it a parent, librarian, or other figure.

Reference

Takeuchi, L. & Stevens, R. (2011). The new coviewing: Designing for learning through joint media engagement. New York, NY: The Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop.