Technology and Digital Media in the Early Years

What We Know, What We Still Need to Learn and Why It Matters

Chip Donohue, PhD
Dean of Distance Learning & Continuing Education
Director of the TEC Center
Erikson Institute

Senior Fellow and Advisor, Fred Rogers Center

About Erikson Institute

Our vision is that every adult who works with young children or on their behalf will be knowledgeable, aware, skilled, and **alive to the possibilities of each child’s life.**
Media literacy for children matters

Media literacy is about helping children develop the life skills they need to become thinkers and makers in the multimedia environment that is their reality...

It is precisely because our culture surrounds us with media that we need to model healthy and productive ways to integrate digital media technologies into our lives.

Faith Rogow

What’s wrong with these pictures?
What are the concerns?

- Too much passive, non-interactive use
- Exposure to inappropriate content
- Commercial messages and in-app sales aimed at children
- Negative impact on social-emotional development – socially isolating, interrupts adult-child relationship

What are the concerns?

- Displaces / replaces “ECE essentials” like hands-on, creative and open-ended play, construction, small manipulatives...
- Reduces outdoor time, decreases physical activity / increases obesity
- Increases sleep disruptions
- Adult media use, misuse, over use and “always on” tech – background TV
What are our goals for tech in ECE?

- Do no harm
- Acknowledge and address the concerns
- Eliminate the false dichotomy
- Explore the intersection of child development, early learning, and children’s media
- Apply the NAEYC & Fred Rogers Center Joint Position Statement, DAP, Lisa Guernsey’s 3Cs, and 40 years of children’s media research
- Focus on digital media literacy
- Become media managers, mediators, mentors and makers

Our digital media literacy matters

- Attitudes
- Knowledge
- Experience
- Competencies
- Leading to fluency
- DML for “4M” educators in formal and informal settings, teacher educators, trainers and parents
Technology and Interactive Media as Tools in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8

A joint position statement of the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children’s Media at Saint Vincent College

Keywords

- Tools
- Intentional
- Appropriate
- Integrated
- Balanced
- Interactive
- Quality content
- Joint engagement
- Access & Equity
- Select, Use, Integrate, Evaluate

= Educators as curators and mentors

When used intentionally and appropriately, technology and interactive media are effective tools to support learning and development.
Child development theory matters

- Know about child development and learning and what it typical at each age and stage of
- Know what is individually appropriate
- Understand the family context
- Know what is culturally important

ECE “essentials” matter

- Creativity, curiosity and wonder
- Open-ended exploration
- Unstructured, active, imaginative play
- Loose parts
- Hands-on materials
- Authentic and deep engagement
- Outdoor play and nature
- Solitary and shared experiences
- Interactions and relationships
Lisa Guernsey’s 3Cs for digital media

• **CONTENT** How does this help children engage, express, imagine, or explore?

• **CONTEXT** How does it complement, and not interrupt, children’s natural play?

• The Unique **CHILD**: How do we choose the right tech tools and experiences for each child’s needs, abilities, interests and developmental stage?

---

Relationships matter

• Young children learn best in the context of interactions and relationships with attentive, responsive, caring adults

• Co-viewing < joint engagement with media – Using media together leads to more learning

• Use media use to encourage pro-social behaviors and promote social/emotional development

• Use technology as a tool to strengthen relationships with adults and peers
Joint engagement matters

Context matters

- Children learn best in active environments when they are engaged in meaningful, interactive and social contexts
- Providing access to quality media requires engaging parents and children:
  - at home
  - in early childhood programs and schools
  - In informal “third spaces” – libraries, museums, zoos, nature centers, out-of-school time programs, community centers and more
Creating media matters

- Young children are capable of creating their own messages and expressing themselves through media.
- Give children (and their adults) control over what they use and how they use it – open ended tools for exploration.
- Consuming media > Meaning-making > Creating media.

Skills and attributes for 21st century learning matter

- Effective oral & written communication skills
- Critical thinking & problem-solving
- Computational thinking
- Agility and adaptability
- Collaboration
- Initiative
- Curiosity and imagination
- Hope and optimism
- Self-regulation
- Grit
- Resilience
- Vision
A healthy media diet matters

All screens are not created equal

- Consider screen exposure throughout the day and across settings
- Shift from “how much” they watch to “what they watch”
- Use media “with” rather than “instead of”
- Place limits on passive use
- Avoid inappropriate content/commercial messages

A healthy media diet matters

All screens are not created equal

- Look for media experiences that are interactive, include positive interactions with others, and give the child control
- Emphasize relationships and joint engagement with media
- Advocate for a digital age definition of “screen-time”
Family media ecology matters

- Understand parental influence as the primary media role model
- Be aware of use – when, by who, where, for what and for how long
- Understand that content is as important as length of time
- Find trusted sources of media recommendations
- Place limits on passive use and avoid inappropriate content

TV may be the only appliance that is more useful after it is turned off.

Family media ecology matters

- Avoid background TV
- Limit screen media before bedtime
- No TVs in children’s bedrooms
- Turn off media and digital devices during meals
- Watch together – joint engagement with media
- Be aware of private tech use replacing traditional public use
- Plan for unplugged time

“What can we do when we turn off the screen?”
To review...what matters?

- Digital media literacy
- ECE essentials
- Child development
- The 3Cs
- Relationships
- Joint-engagement
- Context
- Creating media
- Skills and attributes for learning
- Healthy media diet
- Family media ecology

The 4Ms for digital age educators

1. **Manager**
2. **Mediator**
3. **Mentor**
4. **Maker**
The 5Es for digital age educators
Martin Blows e-words framework

- **Swap** traditional practices with ICT
- **Exchange** learners by using a richer mix of media
- **Enrich** learning through the use of ICT
- **Enhance** the content, process and location of learning
- **Extend** learners to take control of their own learning
- **Empower** learners to take control of their own learning

---

My recipe for mindful media use

- **3Cs** – Content, Context, Child
- **4Ms** – Media Manager, Mediator, Mentor and Maker
- **5Es** – Exchange, Enrich, Enhance, Extend, Empower
- Make intentional choices and use appropriate tech and media
- Use tools that encourage pro-social behaviors, interactions, relationships, and joint engagement
- Follow the children’s lead – give them choices and control
- Help children progress from media consumers to creators
- Promote digital media literacy (yours and theirs)
What if?
We thought of screens as windows
• Instead of looking at the screen, could the child be looking into and through a window – a pass-through to something beyond?
• Would we think differently about window-time rather than screen-time?
• Would we be counting minutes of window-time and placing the same limits?
• How would teachers use technology differently?
• How would parents use digital windows instead of screens at home?
• What is our educational window of opportunity?

Every window – architectural or electronic – is a gateway to adventure, inquiry, fantasy, storytelling, self-discovery and learning. David Kleeman, PlayVangelist

What is essential is invisible to the eye

Mindful Media Use Matters
...Let’s not get so fascinated by what the technology can do that we forget what it can’t do...It’s through relationships that we grow best and learn best.