

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 (NAEYC) and the Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children's Media at Saint Vincent College.

A summary

Today's children are growing up in a rapidly changing digital world, far removed from the world where television then videos and computers were the new technologies.

This changing digital world is providing educators across the country with both challenges and opportunities; and to seek answers as to how these technologies can enhance children's learning within the context of what they know about how young children learn.

This comprehensive position statement is intended to give guidance to those working in education and care services, although parts of the statement would be useful for parents.

The position statement reminds us that technology and interactive media can be anything from computers, tablets, e-readers and interactive whiteboards to more traditional tools such as cassette recorders and projectors.

It also reminds us that 'technology is here to stay' and in essence that these electronic tools have already changed the lives of

many in how we communicate with and reach others, how we teach, and how professional development is delivered.

Many educators and families have concerns about the amount of screen time children are exposed to, and with the range of digital media available to young children, both in their home and care environments. The statement refers to research that supports limiting and/or denying exposure by very young children to media. In addition, the position statement addresses the negative impact of non-interactive media on young children and suggests ways to ensure engagement with the media is more purposeful and engaging. There is some contention as to whether it is the quality of the program as opposed to the amount of time engaged with it. This will require educators to make some decisions around these issues.

The statement cautions educators to be thoughtful when introducing technologies to ensure this inclusion is purposeful and will deliver the intended outcomes for children. Just as young children need opportunities and guidance to 'learn about books' so they need practice and guidance to learn about technologies.

The statement offers eight principles to guide educator thinking and practices. These include that:

- the introduction of technology tools

and interactive media should not harm children

- developmentally appropriate practices must guide any decisions to include these
- considerations must be given to children's age, interests, abilities, linguistic backgrounds and needs
- the effective use of technologies must be active, hands on, engaging and empowering.

In addition the use of technology can enhance home and school connections, as well as enhancing early childhood practice when integrated into the daily routines, environments and the curriculum.

The statement asks educators to consider the issue of equity and access for young children and families, just as the Head Start program in the 1960s found access to print media was very different for children from differing socioeconomic backgrounds. What are our responsibilities as educators to ensure all children have the opportunity to develop 'early technology skills' when we know some children already have access through their home environments? These are important considerations if we believe in bridging that gap for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. This also impacts on services where some are resourced and able to include modern technologies and others are struggling to remain open. This then becomes an issue largely for policy-makers.

... THE POSITION STATEMENT
ADDRESSES THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF
NON-INTERACTIVE MEDIA ...



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In addition the position statement asks us to think about the possibilities for children for whom English is a second language, and how we might use technologies to include and enhance the experiences for children with high support needs.

The statement reminds us of the early possibilities of learning evaluative strategies for educators, parents and children so to effectively analyse and make critical decisions about the suitability of programs, applications etc.

The position statement also reminds us of the need for ongoing research into the effects of technologies and interactive media on young children and to ensure

learning opportunities are supported and enhanced while maintaining the essence of early childhood, that of learning through play.

The seven recommendations described by NAEYC and the Fred Rogers Center for early childhood educators detail steps to take that will support educators to make decisions on how they currently use technology in their programs and consider possibilities for the future. This is an area well worth considering for and including in a future Quality Improvement Plan, as described under the *National Quality Framework*. This position statement can be used as a support to make informed, intentional and appropriate uses of

technology and media in educational programs for young children.

Children's experiences with technologies and interactive media are increasingly part of their lives. It is our responsibility to consider these as part of the everyday curriculum and frameworks within which we work.

For further information, seek the full statement at: www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/PS_technology_WEB2.pdf

This was adopted in January, 2012.

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