Supporting Learning with Technology in the Early Childhood Classroom

Technology as an Educational Tool

Early childhood educators share responsibility for providing educational programs that appropriately support each child's learning and development. Children must be prepared to function as knowledgeable, productive, independent, creative thinkers in a technology based society. Access and use of information will be one of the many skills necessary for entering tomorrow's workforce.

We recognize that the use of technology in our world is prevalent and significantly impacts our lives and the lives of children in our classrooms. We need only to use an ATM, have purchases scanned at the grocery store or heat food in the microwave to recognize the impact of technology.

The Southern Early Childhood Association believes that the use of technology is a powerful tool for supporting all learning in the early childhood classroom and should be integrated into all classroom curricula rather than utilized as an isolated curriculum component. When viewed as a tool for learning, the appropriate use of technology in the early childhood classroom has the potential to enhance the cognitive and social development of young children.

The use of technology in the early childhood classroom should be evaluated in the same manner as any other learning methodology or material. It should be viewed as a tool or means of supporting educational goals and outcomes and not as the goal or curriculum in itself.

The Southern Early Childhood Association (SECA) believes:

Appropriate technology tools provide a supportive environment that integrates the technology within curriculum to enhance learning for all children.

- We support teacher selection of software and computer activities that match the developmental needs of children. These selected activities support and extend the learning that occurs throughout the entire program. Children may respond to a shared reading activity by creating an illustration using a graphics program or by using a simple word processor to write their own stories.

- We support the use of technology to provide full access to learning for all children. Children who cannot hold a crayon to draw may be able to construct

their own drawings with stamps and drawing elements available in specific software programs.

Appropriate technology tools encourage learning activities that are self-paced and driven by the child's own interests and abilities.

> • We encourage teachers to allow children to self-select software programs and activities. Children are allowed to manipulate the hardware and independently control the pace and direction of the software. Children experience controlling their environment and learn how to use the technology as a tool for communication and creative expression.

Appropriate technology tools provide a learning environment that helps children actively construct their own knowledge through open-ended, discovery-based activities.

> • We encourage teachers to provide environments where children participate as active learners. Children use the computer as one of many ways of representing their learning. A child may explore print by using traditional writing materials to create letters and words or a child may locate letters on the keyboard and display them on the computer screen.

Appropriate technology tools introduce a variety of opportunities to support and extend cognitive and social development.

> • We support the selection of software that provides opportunities for children to develop social skills. As children work together at the computer, they interact with each other, practice taking turns, and share thinking strategies.

Appropriate technology tools recognize each child as an individual.

> • We promote teacher recognition and knowledge that all children need to see themselves represented in the materials that are used within the classroom and encourage them to select software that contains realistic representations of a diverse community. Software programs that support gender role equity, show people of different ages and abilities and represent a variety of cultures should be considered.

Appropriate technology tools support teacher communication, creativity and productivity.

> • We encourage teachers to use technology as a tool for their own learning and expect that they will model the appropriate use of the technology in their classroom. Teachers utilize technology as a communication tool, creating avenues of communication with parents and children. Teachers utilize technology as a learning tool for direct instruction--creating a language experience story with a child by word processing the child's oral story and then printing a copy.

Things to Look for When Selecting Software:

- Content is non-violent, age appropriate and meets the developmental needs of the child.
- Software contains realistic representations of people (diverse cultures, gender, ages, families).
- Open-ended, discovery-based software that is controlled by the child.
- Provides opportunities for children to work independently or with another child.
- Software grows with the child and becomes more complex.
- Provides opportunities for creativity and problem solving.

References

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