Kids and Screens: What’s our Role?
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About me . . .
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Learning objectives
- Identify actions and resources that will empower teachers, home visitors and families to “rethink the screen”
- Discuss the growing need to develop and adopt a new definition of technology literacy at the levels of family, school and society
- Redefine our role to include fostering technology literacy for our children and families
Impacts of screen media on developing bodies and brains

- Less face to face interaction
- Delayed Language development
- Limited/immature play
- Difficulties with emotional regulation
- Attention difficulties
- Decreased creativity and empathy
- Electronic Screen Syndrome
- Addiction

- Higher rates of anxiety/depression/aggression
- Disturbances in sleep
- Weight gain/obesity/unhealthy eating habits
- Low self-esteem/unhappiness
- Underdeveloped sensory system
- Low tone/musculoskeletal problems
- Migraines
- Poorer memory and school performance

“Neurologically, human beings haven’t caught up with today’s over-stimulating environment, which is why many neuroscientists and psychologists theorize that we are seeing an explosion of developmental and psychiatric disorders.”

Michael Gurian, The Minds of Boys

Around the globe . . .

China
South Korea
France
What’s the #1 question parents ask about screen time?

How much screen time is okay for my child?

How much screen time?
Are we focusing on the wrong question?
Things to consider for young children...

The three “Cs”
- Content
- Context
- Child

Content
- Developmentally appropriate
- Educational vs entertaining
  - “What Makes Media Educational?”
- Be aware of marketing and violence
  - Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood

Context
- Digital babysitting
- Creative vs consumptive use
- Joint media engagement vs independent viewing
Joint media engagement

Context
- Social/administrative pressure
- Technology for technology’s sake?
  “What functional skill is the child gaining and is the virtual experience better than the real one?”

Child
- Begin with AAP guidelines
  
  Family Media Plan
Child
- Must know the needs of the child:
  - What is his/her developmental level?
  - Previous as well as current experience with technology?
  - What is the predisposition for difficulties with attention or learning?
  - What are special needs that technology may support?

Guiding principle for early childhood
We have a responsibility to understand, and help caregivers understand, that it’s not the technology itself that enhances the child’s learning – it’s the strategies used during interactions with the child that make the difference!

Reflection
- How does focusing on the 3 Cs (content, context, child) impact our role in supporting families and children regarding the appropriate use of technology?
- Home visitors?
- In the classroom?
Towards a new technology literacy...

“At its best, TV can educate and inspire. High-quality documentaries offer insights into history that no book can equal. Nature programs...take us to places many of us will never be able to visit. Children’s educational shows have the proven ability to help children learn to read, to be kind, and to share. In short, when used appropriately, television has the power to expand horizons and help children’s cognitive, social, and emotional development.”

- Christakis and Zimmerman, 2006

What is technology literacy?

In the past, technology literacy was largely defined as skill in operating computers.

Technology literacy

- NAEYC defines technology literacy as having the knowledge and experience to think critically about the selection, analysis, use and evaluation of technology and media for young children.
- We must continually educate ourselves on the appropriate use of technology.
Technology literacy
- Technology should not be allowed to compromise other developmental opportunities such as physical play, outdoor exploration, art, music, and social interactions.
  - Technology does not drive purposeful learning, teachers’ intentional instructional planning does.

Technology Literacy
Implications regarding:
- Nature of technology itself and the impact on developing and adult brains and bodies
- "Commercialization" of childhood and violent content
- Disconnecting from the natural world
- Excessive waste and disposal of rapidly changing technology
- Ethical considerations now and in the future

Technology Literacy
The Alliance for Childhood proposes a new definition of technology literacy:
- The mature capacity to participate creatively, critically, and responsibly in making technological choices that serve democracy, ecological sustainability, and a just society.

Tech Tonic, Towards a New Literacy of Technology
Technology Literacy

How do we prepare today’s children to make wise decisions about tomorrow’s technologies?

Technology Literacy

Why?

- Entertain
- Zone out/distraction
- Learn/share information
- Connect
- Create
- Habit/Addiction
- Work
- Everyone else is doing it

We must begin with ourselves
Technology Literacy

What are we teaching?

Talk with colleagues

“Health issues aside, are we teaching children to be creative and responsible in wielding technological power? Or are we training them for passive dependency? Are we teaching them about the wisdom of setting healthy limits in the design and use of technologies? Or that neither adults nor children are really free or powerful enough to set limits?”

Tech Tonic, Towards a New Literacy of Technology

Facilitate intentional conversations about the use of screen media in early childhood classrooms.
Technology Literacy

How can we support families?

Talk with parents
- Are we in a state of learned helplessness in responding to increasing evidence of the negative effects of high-tech childhood?
- Provide guidance and mentoring in gradually introducing children to the full range of technologies in developmentally appropriate ways.

Talk with kids
- We have the opportunity to guide education that prepares children to participate in discussions and decisions about the thoughtful use of technology for their own needs and explore how technologies can help us connect with others to promote a just, sustainable world.
Talk with kids

- Help them ask: “Why are we/why am I using screen media?”
- View technology as one tool for learning
- Understand impacts on their bodies, brains and learning
- Understand impacts of commercialization/advertising
- Help them ask: “How can I use technology to solve problems and help others?”

A special note . . .

The Nature Principle

- Time spent connecting with nature is the most beneficial action when addressing an addiction to technology.
- Will a firm grounding in the natural world make a difference in the kids' decisions we/our children make regarding how to use and design new technologies?

Let’s create!
Ready, set ... action!

Redefining our role:
- Impact on early brain development, play, attention, and language
- ECS/additive nature of technology
- Three “Cs” - content, context, child
- New definition of technology literacy

Ready, set ... action!
- Training?
- Colleagues?
- Parents/families?
- Resources/materials?
- Partnering with other organizations?
- Other?

What actions will make the most difference?
What resources do we need?

Share out!
Our superpower . . .

- Our superpower is that we can change the trajectory of child development, and that kind of change has lifelong effects.
  - Cari Ebert

- When you change the beginning of the story, you change the entire story.
  - Dr. Christakis