Incorporating Technology into Early Childhood Pre-Service Field Experiences

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Preparing early childhood pre-service teachers is very challenging due to the national and state mandates to diversify experiences among settings that range from infant and toddler rooms up through the primary grades of elementary school. Within these experiences pre-service teachers will have opportunities to work with experienced and qualified individuals who are dedicated to serving families and nurturing the development and education of young children. However, due to the lack of program continuity and well-integrated curriculum across program boundaries, pre-service teachers will encounter a wide range of classroom practices and program policies.

Within university and college-based teacher education programs, faculty and staff are striving to understand and incorporate technology into teaching practices and pre-service teacher learning activities. Incorporating technology into teacher preparation programs is driven by goals that include: (1) broadening young professionals understanding the electronic communication, professional development and professional research, (2) nurturing pre-service teachers’ skills in using technology to promote young children’s understandings and broaden the scope of classroom learning activities, and (3) developing pre-service teachers’ understanding of the appropriate and effective applications of technology in early childhood curricula.

Preparing early childhood pre-service teachers through field-based courses and field-based internships presents challenges regarding the acceptance, development and implementation of technology as a fully integrated component of early childhood classrooms. Most early childhood programs promote the development of young children across several developmental domains. A growing number of programs are focusing on basic skills and pre-academic activities that may or may not be deemed appropriate for young children. The use of technologies as a viable means of promoting young children’s development and learning has largely been attributed to those programs that focus on “academics,” rather than developmental approaches.

This paper suggests that early childhood teacher educators could enhance the development of pre-service teachers and neighboring early childhood programs by identifying classroom strategies and curricular constructs that would promote the use of technology in early childhood settings. Further, teacher educators should broaden their view of technology to include materials and objects that promote children’s abilities to understand (1) parts to whole relationships, (2) systems that function and “work,” (3) computer and electronic hardware that promotes the use of touch and grasping as a means of input, and (4) multimedia as a means of individual creative expression. This paper suggests that developmental early childhood programs should view the use of technologies as an on-going process of learning and interactivity, rather than the widely held belief that technology is a simple input/output relationship. Field-based early childhood programs should model, promote and facilitate the integration of technologies into training sites within their surrounding communities. Due to the diverse needs and program differences found in childcare, federal preschool programs, public school early childhood programs and early childhood special education programs, the challenges are great, but not insurmountable.