Fred Rogers Center contributed to report

STUDY FINDS EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION NOT RELIANT ON CLASSROOM TECHNOLOGY


The study, conducted by Northwestern University’s Center on Media and Human Development in collaboration with the Fred Rogers Center and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), surveyed 945 early childhood educators to gauge their access to, use of and attitudes toward incorporating technology into their classrooms. Comparison data was available from a similar 2012 study conducted by the group.

“The initial study released in 2012 coincided with the NAEYC/Fred Rogers Center position statement on technology tools in early childhood classrooms serving children birth through age 8. Recent findings showed that about half of the educators surveyed knew about this statement,” Fernandes noted.

“I am impressed by the rapid adoption of tablets in preschool classrooms since 2012,” said Dr. Ellen Wartella, director of the Center on Media and Human Development. “Now more than half of classrooms have tablets.”

Educators reported having significantly greater access to tablets in the classroom in 2014 (55%) compared to 2012 (29%), and interactive white boards (26% versus 22%) across all program types and student income levels. Access decreased for televisions and DVDs (71% from 80%) and digital cameras (88% from 92%), which is likely a sign that tablets are replacing those technologies.

“We were surprised by not only the twofold increase in access to tablet computers in early childhood classrooms since 2012, but the universal adoption of the technology across program types and student income levels,” said researcher Dr. Courtney Blackwell.

In 2014, more educators reported receiving professional development compared to educators in 2012 (49% versus 41%), yet more educators in 2014 disagreed with the idea that technology could improve individualized learning, critical thinking and higher order thinking. Even though access to tablets has increased, educators’ use of them has remained stagnant and their attitudes toward the value of technology in early childhood education dipped slightly.

“One of the problems could be that we need more materials curated specifically for preschool teachers,” Wartella said. “Teachers may be struggling to find appropriate content to use on tablets with young children for specific lessons and may therefore be experiencing less excitement about the technology.”
The new study tracked educators' thoughts on the appropriate age young children should first be exposed to media – at least 3 years of age for television, but as young as 2.5 years of age for computers and tablets.

Survey respondents in both 2012 and 2014 are NAEYC members. Screenings ensured that participants worked with young children ages 0-8. The average teaching experience was 20 years and included work in center-based, school-based and home-based care as well as Head Start programs.

Dedicated to research, training and public policy outreach, the Center on Media and Human Development at Northwestern University's School of Communication studies the effects of media and its related technology on children, particularly in educational contexts.

The Center on Media and Human Development’s director, Ellen Wartella, Ph.D., is the Al-Thani Professor of Communication in the School of Communication at Northwestern University and a leading scholar of the role of media in children’s development. Wartella is an author of more than a dozen books, numerous book chapters and research reports. She holds courtesy appointments in several departments and serves on the boards of some of the most influential children’s educational advocacy organizations in the country.

Established at Saint Vincent College in 2003, the Fred Rogers Center enriches the development of current and emerging leaders in the fields of early learning and children’s media by supporting the professional advancement and mentoring of the next generations of Fred Rogers through the Early Career Fellows program, educational opportunities for undergraduate Fred Rogers Scholars, research and special collaborations by Rogers Center Senior Fellows and resources and information on the developmentally appropriate use of media. The Center is the official home of the Fred Rogers Archive as well as a straightforward, understanding and compassionate voice for the healthy social and emotional development of children birth to age 8 (www.fredrogerscenter.org).

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