Wrapping God’s Youngest Citizens in Hope

Kathryn Aschliman and Tami Keim

Mennonite Church USA Convention  ~~  Phoenix, Arizona

July 2, 2013
• This presentation focuses on topics relating to on-screen time and the effect technology has on the social, emotional, physical, cognitive and spiritual development of young children.

• It explores ways families, educators and congregations may use media wisely so that it becomes a hope building tool for our children.
The power point information and links from this seminar may be found on these two websites:

- MECN (Mennonite Early Childhood Network) through the MEA website:
  http://www.mennoniteeducation.org/MECN
- Building Faith website:
  http://buildingfaithmecn.weebly.com/
Did you know?

• On any given day, 64% of babies between 1 and 2 watch TV and videos for an average of slightly over 2 hours

• In 2011 there were 3 million downloads just of Fisher Price apps for infants and toddlers

• Estimates of average time preschoolers spend with screen media range from 2.2 to 4.6 hours/day
The first five years build the foundation for everything that follows
Effects of Technology

Cognitive Development

Brain synapses are formed through experiences.
Effects of Technology

Cognitive Development
What helps brain/cognitive development?

• Stable warm nurturing relationships with a few key people

• A variety of rich learning opportunities
  • Stimulating environments
  • Opportunities for movement and interaction
  • Engaged activity with the world

• A foundation of social-emotional stability and security
“... TV is a ‘total disclosure medium’ that exposes children to adult knowledge before they are ready.”

Neil Postman
Author and Communications Professor

What are young children ready to learn?
Effects of Technology

Social/Emotional Development

“Intelligence doesn’t come from cognitive stimulation but rather has its origins in specific emotional experiences”

Dr. Jack Shankoff
When the reader is physically present, there is greater activation of the child’s frontal lobe (the part of the brain associated with reasoning, emotions, and problem solving) than when the reader is on a screen.
A real concern: Increased screen time contributes to kids being less connected to their family, friends, and others. A recent study from New Zealand showed that both today and 20 years ago, increased screen time was associated consistently with poorer attachment to parents and peers.
Effects of Technology

Physical Development

• Childhood obesity

For each hour of television viewing per day, children, on average, consume an additional 167 calories (60)

When Children Eat What They Watch research
Effects of Technology

Physical Development

• Sedentary lifestyle

According to a 4-year study:

“The fastest growing segment of users of antidepressant drugs was found to be preschool children aged 0-5 years.”
Effects of Technology

Physical Development

• Body image marketeering

In 1983 companies spent $100 million marketing to children. Now it is more than $17 billion/year!
REMEMBER, IF WE GET THEM WHILE THEY'RE YOUNG, WE'VE GOT THEM FOREVER.

RETAIL INDUSTRY
Effects of Technology

Physical Development

Indoor childhood epidemic

“Whole Child: Developing Mind, Body and Spirit through Outdoor Play”

Access at Be Out There by the National Wildlife Federation
Effects of Technology

Spiritual Development

Created with a love of nature

By enabling your biophilia, that inborn bond with the flora and fauna of your homeland, you will:

✓ Reduce stress
✓ Become more focused
✓ Enhance your emotional and social development
✓ Enhance creativity,
✓ problem solving ability,
✓ self-esteem, and
✓ self control
✓ Improve cognitive ability
✓ Improve health

Children and Nature Network
Effects of Technology

Spiritual Development

• Created with a love of nature

Plotkin, Bill. NATURE AND THE HUMAN SOUL; Cultivating Wholeness and Community in a Fragmented World. (Eco-soul centric human development) characterizes the early childhood years as

“The Innocent in the Nest”
Effects of Technology

Spiritual Development

Trained for servant leadership

So often today it is as if children are being remote controlled by the scripts of others (television, videos, electronic toys), instead of coming up with their own unique stories and problems to solve.
Effects of Technology

Spiritual Development

• Nurtured with Hope

Cartoons on commercial channels often have more violence than do adult shows
Media literacy IS important for our children today

- Children need media literacy skills to be successful in any career in a digital world.

- Literacy in a digital world requires more than reading and writing skills.

- It is about maximizing the benefits and minimizing the potential harm.

Importance of media literacy today
Media Literacy: critical engagement with mass media

Digital Literacy: personal, technological, and intellectual skills for living in digital society
To be engaged and critical media consumers, kids need to develop skills and habits of media literacy. These skills include being able to access media on a basic level, to analyze it in a critical way based on certain key concepts, to evaluate it based on that analysis and, finally, to produce media oneself. This process of learning media literacy skills is media education.
The American Academy of Pediatrics has reaffirmed its policy to discourage parents from allowing screen time for infants and children under 2 years of age.

It’s the first new policy statement from the pediatrician’s group since 1999 and the first to address the new media that’s been developed to appeal to the youngest television watchers, computer users and smartphone swipers.

AAP Screen-free under 2 Oct, 2011
HOW can we – and our children – use digital media well?

To maximize its benefits and minimize its potential harm.
Discuss ideas together

• What guidelines do we follow to help us determine when and how to use digital media with/for children?

• How are we using digital media effectively?
Guidelines and ideas gleaned from the 7/2/13 seminar discussion

• Keep a balance between digital media usage and other activities. Use it as an additional activity, not just as a replacement for other activities and interactions.

• Use the media WITH children, providing valuable interactions in the process

• Model thoughtful digital media for the children

• Encourage active versus passive uses of technology
Continued ideas from the seminar discussion

- Allow a child to have total screen time up to \( \frac{1}{2} \) hour in the morning and the evening during the week and up to 2 hours on the weekend
- Provide parental guidance and guidelines for acceptable websites, programs, games, etc.
- Allow children some choices within the parameters to select the specific website, program, etc. for the allotted screen time
- Use the child’s decision as a learning tool for making choices
Continued ideas from the seminar discussion

• Keep all computers and digital media in the family’s common spaces where parents have access and visibility

• Use digital media as an avenue for interactions such as Skyping with friends and family as well as across countries and cultures

• Provide opportunities for children to create digital media to share with others – create videos, demonstrate activities, document learning, etc.
Continued ideas from the seminar discussion

• Make outdoor time a priority for all ages, encouraging free exploration of their world. Take technology along – for example, record bird calls (and photos) and then use the internet to learn about the birds

• Carefully select quality websites, games, and other resources using sources such as the Haugland/Gerzog Developmental Scale for Websites
Continued ideas from the seminar discussion

• Use digital media in group settings
  – Document children’s learning and experiences
    • Take photos in SS class of children’s learning activities and interactions; put the snapshots to music and give to parents
  – Follow Google Earth from home to wherever children are learning about
  – Use digital resources for sharing content
• And............What are your ideas?!
Electronic Resources

• The Alliance for Childhood  Research and advocacy

• Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood
  — Facing the Screen Dilemma Guide and numerous other resources

• CEASE (Concerned Educators Allied for a Safe Environment)
  — They have a pamphlet, SELECTING APPROPRIATE MEDIA FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

• Center on Media and Child Health

• Common Sense Media

• Community Playthings  FREE resources available through the website
  — Sign up to receive the free e-newsletter “collage” which is produced 6 times a year.
  — Many other resources also available – Examples include:
    • The Wisdom of Nature
    • The Wisdom of Play
    • Natural Learning; the outdoor classroom (Collage, Jan/Feb 2013)
    • The Project Approach to Learning (Collage, Mar/Apr 2013)

• CyberStart  Choosing Developmentally Appropriate Software

• The Effects of Electronic Media on Children Ages 0 to 6: A History of Research  January 2005; prepared for the Kaiser Family Foundation
And more….

- **Haugland/Berzog Developmental Rating Scale for Web Sites** Article and scale

- **How to Assess On-line Sources about Media and Young Children**

- **Media Smarts**
  - Tips for Managing Children's Television Viewing
  - Managing Television in the Home
  - Resource about media literacy - what are the values and how to use it wisely

- **Be Out There** by the National Wildlife Federation
  - “Whole Child: Developing Mind, Body and Spirit through Outdoor Play”

- **National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute**
  - WE CAN (Ways to Enhance Children’s Activity and Nutrition) - Screen time tracking chart to help understand your family’s media habits and provides tips for increasing physical activity

- **TRUCE** Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment (TRUCE) is a national group of educators deeply concerned about how children's entertainment and toys are affecting the play and behavior of children in our classrooms.
  - TRUCE Media and Young Children Action Guide
  - Facing the Screen Dilemma
• Guidelines for choosing developmentally appropriate software by CyberStart

• Article by Susan Haugland about selecting appropriate software: Selecting software
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1998 Haugland, Susan V., and Gerzog, Elissa. Based upon the Haugland Developmental Software Scale. All rights reserved.
Cavalletti, Sofia. THE RELIGIOUS POTENTIAL OF THE CHILD: The Description of an Experience from Ages 3 to 6


Plotkin, Bill. NATURE AND THE HUMAN SOUL: Cultivating Wholeness and Community in a Fragmented World. (Eco-soul centric human development)


Westerhoff, John W. III. WILL OUR CHILDREN HAVE FAITH?

Yust, Karen Marie. REAL KIDS, REAL FAITH: Practices for Nurturing Children’s Spiritual Lives
Dear God, you have blessed us with the care and guidance of young children.

But how do we best support children's growth, development, and learning, to serve your purposes in a world radically changed by technology?

As we consider whether, why, how, and when to use screen time with young children, may these devices be used as hope-filled, peace-building tools.

Help us to balance children's screen time by providing many other quality experiences so that they may live more child-friendly and less media-saturated lives.

Submitted by Kathryn Aschliman