We're Off to See the Wizard: New Tech Tools for Child Care Administration 2.0

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Q: What do you feel is the most important tech tool for a teacher to keep in touch with parents in this age? The more the parents are aware of the more they may be able to assist in the education of their child.

A: There is not one magic tool, but if the goal is to improve communication, share general information about parenting, and build relationships that become partnerships with parents, then I think you start with ways to communicate more effectively. Use email, create an email distribution list, send out an e-Newsletter, create an FAQs for child development and parenting topics on your website, provide links to other resources and websites, use RSS feeds on your to send out notifications when new content has been posted, send a parenting tip of the day as a short text message or tweet, create a Facebook page and invite parents to participate, host an "ask the teacher" discussion on your website once a month (asynchronous allows for anytime, anywhere participation by busy parents)... In other words, figure out what you want to accomplish, understand the technology access and skills of your staff and parents, ask the parents how they want to be communicated with and give them choices of the electronic options, and be sure those parents who do not have access or who do not use technology still can access the information. Use technology tools to create community and to engage, inspire and empower the parents of the children in your care. Now that's worthy of the wizard!

Q: This is so timely! Our prek program just joined Twitter today! I can't wait to get the links. What types of digital technologies do you see infused into the daily routines in preschool classrooms besides the computer and camera?

A: We're working on the revision and update of the 1996 NAEYC Position Statement on Technology and Young Children and we're coming to understand that digital technology tools and screen media like desktop and laptop computers, netbooks, tablets, mobile and handheld devices, digital cameras and video camcorders, multimedia players, cell phones, multi-touch interfaces, interactive whiteboards, software applications, and the Internet, have all found their way into early childhood classrooms in interesting, effective and developmentally appropriate ways. As I talked about, high tech tools have found their way into the personal and professional lives of early childhood educators, and our responsibility it to have the technologically and media literacy needed to make informed and intentional choice about what technology children use it, how they use it and what they do with it. How exciting that you're on Twitter. You'll find a wealth of resources and ideas at the NAEYC Technology and Young Children Interest Forum at http://techandyoungchildren.org website, on the ECETECH-L@lists.maine.edu listserv, on Diigo at http://groups.diigo.com/groups/ecetech and on the Web Wonder's Wiki Project at http://ecetech.wikispace.com/

Q: If you could only get involved with one of these social networks which one is the best for ECE?

A: The "must have" social networks I talked about during the Webinar were Facebook, Twitter, Linked-In, Wikispaces and user-contributed content sites like YouTube. Each has a different purpose and audience and I use them all differently. The key is to be where parents, families and other ece professionals are. I think Facebook is the easiest to get started on, and odds are you already know a number of people on Facebook. Twitter takes some getting used to. Wikis are an amazing way to collaborate with other professionals, and Linked-In is more a professional-to-professional network. Remember my advice, forma play group and try it out to figure out for yourself what works best. See you out there.

Q: With Social Media any resources on rules for use while in the workplace

A: Fran posted some resources that I encourage you to look at. Issues of teachers "friending" parents, posting personal photos, and confidentiality issues in what status updates are posted and commented on make it important that you have policies and model Digitally Appropriate Practice for staff and parents.

Q: Can you post Chip's Delicious Acct URL?
A: I'm not active on Delicious anymore. I've been using Diigo as the Social Bookmarking tool with our online students at Erikson. A great one to check out and participate in is the Technology and Young Children Interest Forum on Diigo at http://groups.diigo.com/groups/ecetech

Q: What about the argument that to internalize and generalize learning training must be done over time with follow-up and reflection? How to respond to people who are skeptical about Webinars, blogs, podcasts, eRadio broadcasts, etc.?

A: I absolutely agree, but I also have no trouble seeing how we're providing these essential elements in our online program at Erikson. I agree that one off self-paced modules with no interaction with other professionals may be of limited value – although they can be useful for learning specific information. The heart of our field is relationships, so online or face-to-face, I want to be sure we're interacting with one another, that there are opportunities to reflect and intentional opportunities to connect what is being learned with practice. We don't want to eliminate face-to-face training, but why not consider blended models where we come together for some of the content and activities, and then continue the conversation, reflections and sharing examples and experience from practice online.

Q: One problem is the up cost the add tech to classrooms (pc software etc). How can the average school add these items as cost effective as possible?
A: We've been asking this question since the early 80's when Apple II computers started finding their way into classrooms. It can't be about buying technology instead of blocks, a sand table or manipulatives or art supplies. These are the essentials of any early childhood setting. But in an increasingly technological world, I think we have an obligation to provide children with hands-on experiences with the technology tools that have become such a ubiquitous part of our world. I think it's easier now than in the early days to share technology between classrooms like laptops, digital camera, etc. so there are cost savings to be realized, but I do worry about children who have their 10 minutes a week at the computer – that's not the kind of experience I'm hoping for. Bottom line (no pun intended) I can't tell you where to find the money but I can urge you to make technology a priority when you think about new equipment and materials.

Q: Thanks for the link, Fran.
A: Hey, Vicki! You are welcome!

Q: Thank you!
A: --unanswered--

Q: Websites that just post info probably are slowing down, but it seems to me that discussion boards are fading faster. Why do you think they didn't catch on?
A: We talked about this on the webinar – the discussions are the heart of our online courses, so I know that it isn't online discussions that are the problem. We need to be thoughtful and intentional about hw and why we use a discussion, and someone needs to facilitate and moderate to keep things on track and to encourage participation. We have things we want to say or there wouldn't be an explosion in user-contribution content, ratings, rankings and social networking. It's about matching the tool to the goals and being sure the human element is still at the core.

Q: Location awareness and GPS tags make people afraid to ever post photos - which takes away from richness of internet sharing. Solutions for that?
A: I think we have to respect the concerns even while we encourage staff to "have a play" with these tools. Play with the tools to figure out how (and why) to use the tools. I can't talk someone out of their techno phobia, but I can gently nudge them toward fun helpful applications that can help them find the value in technology tools.

Q: Yes, but technology is a LOT more costly if you buy the things and fail to have staff who know how to use them properly!
A: That's an important point – staff need technology knowledge and competence to make informed choices and to use the tools you provide. "Yes, we have a computer in the classroom…it's in the corner covered up right now…" When teachers feel confident and competent they are able to use the tools at hand in effective ways. We laughed about findsing a middle schooler for tech support, but perhaps we need to embrace the teachable moment more and invite young children to teach us how to use the tools they are so comfortable with as the "born digital" generation.

Q: is audacity better than garageband?
A: We like Audacity for our online faculty and students because it is easy for them to use, easy for us to manage and has helped faculty create presence in their online courses by narrating PowerPoints, posting audio comments in a discussion, or audio feedback on an assignment. An audio files are small and easy to manage compared to video, so it also addresses some concerns we have have about the experience on the user's end if they have slow Internet access.

Q: When I do my tech for DLLs workshop, I use a self-assessment sheet send them around to find people who know how to do a technology they don't know and set up future learning buddies
A: Great idea – and then you can nudge them toward virtual playgroups if they share an interest in a particular technology tool.

Q: I have a stack of cookbooks that I love, but I never look through them anymore - easier to look up a recipe on line than flipping through
A: Me, too, but I still love taking down the cookbook and paging through looking for something new to try. But I don't even know where my phonebook is. I love reading on my iPad, but I'm not ready to give up books. Like most things we talked about, it's not an either or, it's in addition to.