

Chapter 6

Technology and Social– Emotional Development in the Early Childhood Environments

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ABSTRACT

The research about the importance of social and emotional roles in learning has increased the focus in many early childhood programs on the social-emotional domains of development. The perceptions of the effects computers and other technology tools have on social/emotional development of young children may influence the acceptance and use of technology in these classrooms. This chapter discusses the research related to technology and social-emotional development, parents' perceptions of what social interactions are important in relation to child-to-child and child-to adult realm, theoretical influences on educational environments, and approaches to intentional use of tools to support these important domains. Technology has changed the socio-cultural environment globally and we, as educators of young children, need to change how we approach social and emotional support for our children.

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INTRODUCTION: SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

When one observes educational environments it is clear that along with academic challenges, social competence issues are concerns that must be effectively addressed in order to promote safe and stimulating learning environments for all children as well as teachers. Findings published in a report by the Commission on Children at Risk (2003) report indicate high and increasing rates of depression, conduct, emotional, and behavioral disorders in children. However, the report also points to the fact that through neuroscience, we have discovered the need for each child to have purposeful, personal relationships based on the idea that a child's brain is hardwired to connect to other people and for moral meaning (Commission on Children at Risk, 2003). A growing body of literature suggests that emotion related processes are necessary for skills and knowledge to be transferred from a school environment to real world decision making (Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007). Immordino-Yang and Damasio (2007) suggest that emotions may play a vital role in helping children decide *when* and *how* to apply what they have learned in school to their lives at home. While a child's brain can re-wire itself to learn languages or overcome reading deficits, this is not the case with social, moral, and emotional development. An article entitled, *Tools that Address Social Development* by W. Stephen Barnett (2007), Director of the National Institute for Early Education Research, acknowledges that "the experiences children have during their preschool years can critically shape the way they think and react to challenges throughout their lives" (p.2). Children must be competent, not only in academic pursuits, but also in social endeavors that will help them initiate, understand, and maintain positive relationships with other children and adults.

The research about the importance of social and emotional roles in learning has increased the focus in many early childhood programs on the

social-emotional domains of development. In most ECE programs the two terms are linked together. For purposes of this chapter we consider emotional as the attainment of emotional capabilities and their expansion as the child grows. We consider social as the development of interaction with the human world around, including relationships with others and also the social skills we need to fit into our culture or society. The combination of the two terms refers to the developing capacity to experience and regulate emotions, form secure relationships, and explore and learn—all in the context of the child's family, community and cultural background.

Conflicting Views of the Influence of Technology and Social-Emotional Development

One major technology controversy in ECE environments is the beliefs about the effects computers and other technology tools have on social/emotional development of young children. In chapter 1 you read about the historic views of technology and probably have a clear understanding that there has always been conflicting views about new forms of technology. The National Academies Board on Children, Youth and Education (2011) uses television as one example. "It (TV) also brought fears that access and exposure to new information and values generated from outside of one's community might erode family cohesion, social values, and children's moral and intellectual development." (p. 1). Many teachers believe that technology can harm socialization and that the isolation of computer play will damage emotional development.

There are two predominant views about this issue among professions. On the web site antonellapaves.com where the Chi Conference discussions are posted, Russell Beale (2010) from the University of Birmingham, UK summarizes the two views of the effects of technology on socialization. Beale writes about the optimistic view of technology and socialization—emphasizing the

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