Developing Identity With Technology in the Kindergarten Classroom

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter describes various ways technology, such as iPads and Promethean boards, is integrated into the kindergarten classroom and its impact. It includes stories of how and why the author chooses how technology is integrated and how their own learning, particularly about race and equity, has impacted their decisions in their educational setting. The chapter describes how the author creates learning experiences designed to provide students with the opportunity to explore their identities as digital citizens.

INTRODUCTION

According to the Washington Superintendent of Public Instruction (2024), the student population of my school district was 15,905, and of those students, 477 attended my school during the 2023-2024 school year. Student racial demographics include 36.5% of the population identifying as Asian, 21.6% identifying as Hispanic/Latina, 15.3% identifying as White, 12.4% as Black/African American, 12.2 as two or more races, 1.3% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and .8% Indigenous [American Indian]/Alaska Native. Nearly half (47%) identify as low income, and about one third of families self-report as being multilingual (31.4%).

I have been teaching at my school for 10 years and have observed a dramatic shift in the use of technology by young learners. In addition to teaching kindergarten, I have taught and co-taught after school enrichment classes for kindergarten through second grade students. When I began teaching kindergarten, technology for student

use included portable CD players to listen to audiobooks. Now, the district has a ratio of one device to one student. Students in pre-kindergarten through second grade use iPads and all other students use Chromebooks.

With this shift in access to technology for learning came a significant amount of learning on my part around effective integration of the technology. Much of this learning is due to the professional learning communities I was and have been part of over the past 13 years. Online (e.g., Twitter, Flipgrid) and in-person communities (e.g., professional conferences) I participated in allowed me to hear and see how other educators were using technology to bring out their student's knowledge and display the genius in their classrooms.

These communities directly impacted the shift in my teaching philosophy from having students utilize technology to consume information to using it to *create*. Throughout my tenure in kindergarten and after school enrichment classes, the ways I implemented student use of technology became more intentional as technology became more available.

The goal of this chapter is to provide a detailed narrative of my journey as an educator that lead me to ask the question, "How can students explore their identities as digital citizens with technology?"

The narrative describes the professional learning experiences that influenced the decisions I made and how I viewed and understood the impact of technology use in the early childhood classroom.

The reminder of this chapter will cover various frameworks that shifted how I approached the use technology in the early childhood education setting. I will also describe teaching and learning practices in my classroom and the implications of my work.

FRAMEWORKS

In her book *Cultivating Genius*, Dr. Gholdy Muhommad (2020) asked, "What is identity?" She defined identity as being "composed of notions of who we are, who others say we are (in both positive and negative ways), and whom we desire to be" (p. 67).

After reading two of Dr. Muhommad's books and understanding the importance of providing students the opportunity to explore their own identities in school, I asked myself the question, "How are students given the opportunity to explore their own identities throughout their experiences at school?" and, "How do I shift from emphasizing skill-based identities in my teaching practices to identities that include and are not limited to, gender, race, culture, friendship, and kinship?"

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