

# THE CASE FOR DIGITAL MEDIA LITERACY

## in EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

- 1. In this digital age, DML is the only way to prepare children to thrive in the world they actually live in.** In a world where information is as likely to be communicated aurally and visually as with printed text, traditional literacy is no longer adequate to provide children with the full benefits that derive from being literate. And in a world where traditional adult “gatekeeping” of media content is increasingly difficult, it is essential to teach children how to analyze and evaluate content for themselves.
- 2. Digital media technologies have significant potential to be effective learning tools.** They allow for individualized instruction and skill rehearsal, expand the subjects and skills that educators are able to cover, give children new ways to express themselves, expand opportunities for interesting conversations, and more. And children are excited by digital media. Report after report from classrooms across the country indicate increased engagement and participation by reluctant learners when media technologies are integrated into learning environments.
- 3. DML provides a way to address the “digital divide,”** providing access to equipment, modeling productive use, giving children opportunities to practice, and encouraging peers to share what they know with one another.
- 4. Communication with image and sound is a natural for preschoolers who don’t yet have text-based language skills.** It enables children to do things they can’t otherwise do.
- 5. DML serves as a bridge between home and school;** it increases the relevance of school by bringing into the classroom the familiar technologies that children see and use at home. And by offering children a chance to use image- and sound-based communication, it can help children better relay information about their day to their families (see #4). It also can improve communication between educators and families. Online records, social networking, e-mail, and video conference capabilities increase capacity for regular, and more substantive, contact.
- 6. Early childhood educators are already using technology,** both in their personal lives and with children. DML provides the guidance they need to use that technology well and avoid modeling bad habits that children have to unlearn later.
- 7. Banning technology is increasingly impossible.** The digital world does more than combine *modes* of communication; it also merges the *means* of communication. As today’s preschoolers grow into adolescence, they won’t be choosing between computers, televisions, radios, music players, game consoles, e-readers, or phones; everything will routinely be accessed through a single device. That means that things we want children to do will be hard to separate from things to which we would prefer they not have access.
- 8. Young children are already using media technologies, and they will continue to use them with or without us.** We can best address concerns about how they use those technologies if they use them with *us*. It isn’t about controlling children’s media use; it is about meeting children where they are and respecting the media aspects of their culture in the same way that we would respect their ethnic identity or religion.
- 9. If not in early childhood, then when?** Early childhood education lays the foundation for traditional literacy; it is the logical place to lay the foundation for digital media literacy as well. And the increasing availability of touch screens and cheap digital cameras remove many of the barriers for young children once posed by keyboards and other interfaces that are difficult to manipulate or too expensive to trust in the hands of a preschooler.
- 10. DML can be used to create a pathway that links early childhood standards to the new Common Core Standards,** as well as to meet the professional standards outlined by organizations like NAEYC. As more schools require students to use digital technologies in the same way they once required students to show up with pencils, the more important it is for early childhood educators to lay the foundations for children to “read” and “write” with those technologies.