5-2017

Integrating Technology into Morning Meeting in Early Childhood

Micaela Borer
Northwestern College - Orange City

Integrating Technology into Morning Meeting in Early Childhood

Micaela Borer

Northwestern College

Orange City, Iowa

Abstract

In early childhood education (ECE), there are many interpretations of the morning meeting. This meeting can encompass learning in several areas of early childhood namely mathematics, literacy, and social skill building. Many activities within morning meeting help with classroom management and can be beneficial to children with special needs as well including morning message, visual schedules, and calendar time. Some ECE professionals are beginning to note that technology can also be included in this crucial part of the school day. Incorporating technology not only will encourage young children to learn, but will prepare them for their future. Technology use is becoming more and more relevant in both the school and work domains. Morning meeting and technology are popular trends in education and are considered developmentally appropriate for an ECE classroom. This literature review will highlight the value of morning meeting and its components and will also discuss the integration of technology into ECE. In the future, active research on this topic would be advantageous, considering the information gathered in this review.

Integrating Technology into Morning Meeting in Early Childhood

There are countless ways early childhood education (ECE) teachers can integrate technology into the classroom. Teachers continuously try to find new methods to keep their students engaged in learning. A new trend that has become popular among ECE professionals is transforming morning meeting into a digital interactive experience for the students. Upgrade the learning experience, by making it exciting and relevant for the students in the classroom (TEDx Talks, 2013). Many teachers have noticed that students are not only engaged, but display positive interactions with peers during activities involving an interactive whiteboard (IWB). This literature review is on the topic of using technology for morning meeting in ECE. Unfortunately, little research has been conducted with this specific focus. Therefore, the discussion will highlight the importance of morning meeting and its components as well as the integration of technology into ECE, anticipating that action research will be done in the future on the combination of both trends.

Morning meeting is commonly referred to as opening, morning message, calendar time, or circle time, dependent on teacher or program preference. The main part of this meeting is the morning message, which is frequently displayed on a message board. The morning message can take several forms, but typically, it consists of constructing meaningful sentences and includes interactions between the teacher and children (Hindman, 2011). During the interactive routine children, participate in authentic literacy activities that also inform them about interesting and meaningful events going on during the day (Labbo, 2005). Children are actively involved in actions such as circling familiar letters or words while the teacher intentionally teaches literacy skills by pointing directly to words and sounds as he or she reads them to the class. "The morning message offers an almost unparalleled opportunity for teachers to show children how

print works" (Hindman, 2012, p. 276). ECE teachers also use morning message to increase

student vocabulary. According to Roskos and Associates (2003), in their interpretation of what is

essential to literacy skill building in early childhood, the number one teaching strategy is for

teachers to use rich talk while engaging children in rich conversations in large group, and other

settings. While the literacy content is important, in order for this practice to be developmentally

appropriate for preschoolers, the words are commonly accompanied by pictures or

representations.

The morning message does not only encompass literacy skills, mathematics can also be

incorporated simply when the teacher introduces counting or quantifying practice within the

message. Some teachers also present math skills during calendar time, such as how many days of

school, coral counting, and simple patterns. Calendar math has become popular in ECE

classrooms across the nation (Ethridge, 2005). Some ECE professionals say that children of

preschool age do not quite understand calendar concepts yet. "True understanding of dates and

the calendar comes with maturity" (Katz, 2008, p. 13). Understanding that these concepts may be

too much for the students in a preschool class, teachers tend to focus more on patterns, number

recognition, and counting when discussing the calendar. One idea is to give each day a name that

is meaningful to the children. For example, if students know that Share Day (Monday) is the first

day they come back in school after their 'at home' days, change Monday on the calendar to

Share Day. Giving meaning to each school day helps students stay 'in control' of their day which

also helps those young children that tend to feel anxious or home sick. These types of changes

can be addressed on the message board as well.

ECE programs have traditionally used this research-based strategy to intentionally teach

students important concepts as well as a classroom management tool. Morning message can be

used to describe the day's events, changes for students to be aware of, and for pointing out

literacy concepts such as letters, site words, and familiar objects. For example, if children usually

participate in center time after snack time, but there is an all school assembly during that time, it

would be acknowledged and discussed during morning message. Beyond discussion, the teacher

would link the change to the visual schedule posted in the classroom.

The morning message, along with visual schedules, has been proven a helpful tool for

students with special needs, including students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

"Though circle-time may be difficult for students with ASD, with the appropriate modifications

and additions to the activities and environment, the experience can be successful for students and

staff alike" (Hume, 2006, p. 10). The morning message gives students a heads up to any changes

that might occur and additional information for the day. This gives the children time to prepare

for the change, if needed. A visual schedule is posted and reviewed each day during morning

meeting as well as throughout the school day. Visual aids such as a daily schedule are used

during morning meeting to give children a sense of predictability for the day and teaches them

how to follow a routine.

After discussing many aspects of the morning message, the main portion of the morning

meeting, it is important to remember other parts that can be just as meaningful to the children.

Morning meeting can be used as an umbrella term that includes calendar and math concepts, a

welcome song, finger plays and literacy concepts, The Pledge of Allegiance, and weather. The

duration of the whole morning meeting activity is between ten to thirty minutes, depending

mainly on the children's engagement, but also the concepts in which the teacher chooses to focus

on each day and conversations that arise. "Early childhood educators need to provide direct

opportunities for interaction" (Paulson, 2010, p. 40). The key is to make morning meeting

exciting by involving the children and encouraging interactions between teacher and children, as well as among peers.

Often included in the morning meeting is activities such as reciting The Pledge of Allegiance, some sort of weather activity, and singing songs. Preschoolers learn to use respect when reciting The Pledge of Allegiance. It may be a bit difficult for them to understand the meaning behind the flag and The Pledge, but they should at least recognize that it is something important and they should show respect when it is recited. "Through the ritual of the school, such as recitation of the Pledge, children begin to recognize and develop respect for national symbols" (Seefeldt, 1989, p. 132). Most ECE programs include weather into their morning meeting, to begin introducing the children to the concept of weather, seasons, and natural changes that occur. ECE teachers will also introduce and sing a variety of songs during the morning meeting. Songs can be used to transition from arrival time to morning meeting, getting them focused for the day. Songs can also be used to teach concepts, such as letters and numbers.

This routine morning activity can provide rich opportunities to build community and can help teach and model respect for others (Smith-Bonahue, 2015). Included in many morning meetings are favorite finger plays or songs that every child has the opportunity to learn and sing with the group. This helps build that community and sense of ownership to the classroom. Many ECE teachers enjoy the relationship building that is present in morning meeting activities. In singing finger plays, familiar songs, and nursery rhymes, children are submerged in literacy skill building, without realizing it. To them, they are singing songs, but to ECE professionals, they are practicing and acknowledging important literacy objectives, such as rhyming, alliteration, and letting-sound recognition.

Morning meeting is an important part in early childhood programs. ECE teachers see this as a time to address social skills and to introduce and review academic concepts (Hume, 2006). The teacher and students discuss the daily schedule, classroom expectations and jobs, and might include calendar time as well. "For many students and staff members, morning meeting is a preferred activity that allows for creativity, interaction, and fun" (Hume, 2006, p. 10). It is usually an open-ended opportunity to have relaxed conversations while embedding learning objectives within the activity. Structuring the morning meeting intentionally can encourage the growth of important social skill development that will become important in the future workplace (Allen-Hughes, 2013). Resolutions of issues from past days or social problems that the teacher has been noticing can be discussed during this time. Coming up with a solution with the students' help, can encourage children to follow rules of the classroom community.

Integrating technology would complement the developmentally appropriate practice of morning meeting, while increasing student excitement and introducing a new component into the increasing trend of the morning meeting. "Technology can be used to increase students' motivation and engagement levels" (Wang, 2010, p. 383). ECE teachers are consistently trying to find ways to encourage active relevant learning experiences for their students, especially during daily routine activities. D. Kirkwood and associates (2014), determines that "integrating technology into the regular school curriculum provides students with additional tools to enhance their learning experiences" (p. 143). Integrating technology into routine tasks can, not only prepare students for their future by familiarizing them with technology and building their skills, but also helps them gain much more.

Technology can increase interactions with peers. "Children in early childhood classrooms interact with peers when using computers. They share and help one another, ask for and provide

information and explanations, and collaborate to solve problems" (McManis, 2012, p. 15).

Children are increasingly utilizing their higher ordering thinking as they work through problems

and help one another. "Young children can be effective teachers for their peers and learning in a

social context can be joyfully collaborative" (Dietze, 2013, pp. 4-5).

According to McManis and Gunnewig (2012), research shows that computer use not only

supports areas of learning, but can increases young children's skills in the social, cognitive,

language, literacy, writing, and mathematics realms. This can be contingent on how the teacher

plans to incorporate its use and the emphasis he or she guides the students to focus on while

using available devices. Studies led by McCarrick and Li (2007), acknowledged that forming

friendships is much higher among children using technology than when they are involved in

experiences such as completing puzzles. They concluded that "peer interaction was present

during 63% of the computer play and only 7% of the puzzle play" (p. 80). It is extremely

important that ECE professionals use classroom technology wisely in order to optimize its use.

In ECE, play is extremely important. It is well known that young children learn best

through play and exploration. Technology can provide a platform for learning in a social world

within and beyond the play environment (McManis, 2012). Using an interactive whiteboard

(IWB) is a great way to incorporate technology into social play and interaction. "Researchers

observe greater collaboration among preschoolers when they use IWB than when they use

traditional desktop computers" (McManis, 2012, p. 15). Utilizing an IWB is also a great addition

to magnify your students' learning. "IWBs have the advantage of enhancing interactivity in the

classroom as the touch screen allows students to interact directly with activities and exercises

(Baran, 2010; Celik, 2012; Muijs, & Reynolds, 2005, as cited in Abuhmaid, 2014, p. 75).

Abuhmaid (2014) concludes that "IWBs are powerful tools which can be utilized by teachers and students in order to enhance teaching and learning" (p. 84).

One idea provided by Betcher, C. and Lee, M. (2009), is to use your IWB to do roll call or attendance in the morning. This is a way to encourage the use of the IWB in ECE by the time the children start their lessons the whole class has already used the IWB at least once. This can provide the children a sense of comfort and familiarity with the IWB and technology in general for continued use throughout the school day. "Technology will continue to advance and evolve. As educators we have a responsibility to reduce tensions that surrounds children's play and technology" (Dietze, 2013, p. 9). Using technology for such a routine part of the day can help calm behaviors that could arise from introducing something new to your young students, which, as ECE teachers know, can be problematic.

"As with all high-quality instruction, teachers need to design activities that meet the needs of their individual children" (Hindman, 2011, p. 188). This includes children with disabilities and ASD as well as any regular education students in the classroom. Kirkwood and associates (2014), states that "technology can address different learning styles by helping students understand their experiences through verbal, written, spatial, quantitative, and/or graphical means" (p. 143). The benefit from adding technology into this daily activity outweighs any alternative. According to Bell (2009), all ages of students react positively to board use.

According to Marli Hoffman (2013), child development specialists have said that the environment that a child grows up in will significantly influence their life going forward. This is what we have to prepare our children for (TEDx Talks, 2013). Knowing this, technology has become one of the most commonly used resources in every area of learning. This great push to incorporate technology into the learning environment is in full effect and teachers around the

globe are feeling pressure to adapt. Hoffman (2013) cited Jim Carroll, a futurist, said 65 percent

of today's preschoolers are projected to work in careers that have not been created yet (TEDx

Talks, 2013). In these future jobs, our preschoolers will undoubtedly be dealing with some sort

of technology. "We live in an increasingly technological world, where people constantly need to

acquire various technological skills and knowledge for daily living and work-life" (Turja, 2009,

p. 354). Understanding the importance of incorporating technology into learning is particularly

important for our society and its future. Exposing ECE students to the use of technology offers

them a foundation to build upon in their professional practice (Dietze, 2013).

Despite the noticeably changing world and the increase of relevance, technology has in

the classroom, some ECE professionals are reluctant to adhere to the technology trend. Many

opposing the issue believe that when technology use is increased in the classroom, social

interactions suffer. "Central to the concerns of technology in preschools is the lack of social

interaction envisioned by some" (McCarrick, 2007, p. 74). Some professionals question how

much is too much when it comes to technology in school, knowing that many children are

getting tech-time at home as well. Additionally, "concern exists that computers will be a

distraction for children, who may choose computers over other appropriate learning experiences

and physical activities" (Cordes & Miller, 2000; Henniger, 1994, as cited by McCarrick, K., &

Li, X. 2007, p 75).

A review of literature shows there are multiple implementations and views of technology

in the classroom in general. "We know that computers are increasingly a part of preschoolers'

lives" (Clements, 2002, p. 340). James M. Ernest and associates (2014) recommended that

careful consideration of the possible benefits and risks that go along with screen time at school.

Dependent on the nature of use, there is no reason why technology should become anything but a positive addition to the classroom.

> "The most important thing to know about technology in a preschool is that it is not allowed to replace anything that you would traditionally do in school. Activities such as running, jumping, climbing, skipping, playing with play-dough, laughing with your friends, dressing up, threading your name, nothing should replace any of these activities. Technology and media should be used to enhance the learning experience and to make it exciting for children" (TEDx Talks, 2013).

In conclusion, integrating technology into morning meeting blends perfectly into ECE play-based curriculum and best practices. The combination of the two trends provide developmentally appropriate practice to a new and exciting presence for both teachers and students. To many ECE teachers, morning meeting has become one of the most important parts of the day. However, some teachers have admitted that this is also the time when they notice more behaviors and less engagement from the students. Through this literature review, a solution can be offered to answer this common problem: Use technology during morning meeting. Although this seems like an easy fix, professionals need to be mindful of their school's resources, their own comfort level with using technology, and guidance to use technology in an age appropriate way. We can use technology to teach the same old things in the same traditional way, or we can capitalize on the benefits of technology by integrating tech-activities to increase achievement and student engagement (Clements, D. H., & Sarama, J., 2002). In the future, conducting active research would be advantageous to determine the link between student engagement and the integration of technology into this portion of the ECE day.

References

Abuhmaid, A. (2014). Teachers' Perspectives on Interactive Whiteboards as Instructional Tools in Four Jordanian Schools. *Contemporary Educational Technology, 5*(1), 73-89.

Allen-Hughes, L. (2013). The Social Benefits of the Morning Meeting: Creating a Space for Social and Character Education in the Classroom.

Betcher, C. &. (2009). The interactive whiteboard revolution: Teaching with IWBs. *Australian Council for Educational Research Press*.

Clements, D. H. (2002). The Role of Technology in Early Childhood. *Teaching Children Mathematics, 8*(6), 340-343.

Dietze, B. &. (2013). Shifting Views: Exploring the Potential for Technology Integration in Early Childhood Education Programs. *Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology, 39*(4).

Ernest, J. M., Causey, C., Newton, A. B., Sharkins, K., & Summerlin, J. (2014). Extending the Global Dialogue About Media, Technology, Screen Time, and Young Children. *Childhood Education*, 182-191.

Ethridge, E. &. (2005). Calendar Math in Preschool and Primary Classrooms: Questioning the Curriculum. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 32*(5), 291-296.

Hindman, A. &. (2011). The Morning Message in Early Childhood Classrooms: Guidelines for Best Practices. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 39*, 183-189.

Hindman, A. &. (2012). Morning Message Time: An Exploratory Student in Head Start. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 40*(5), 275-283.

Hume, K. (2006). Making the most of morning meeting. *The Reporter, 11*(3), 10-14.

Katz, L. G. (2008). *Calendar Time for Young Children: Good Intentions Gone Awry.* Retrieved from NAEYC: http://www.naeyc.org/files/tyc/file/CalendarTime.pdf

Kirkwood, D. W. (2014). Bridging the Gap: Meeting the Needs of Early Childhood Students by Integrating Technology and Environmental Education. *International Journal of Early Childhood Environmental Education, 2*(1).

Labbo, L. D. (2005). From Morning Message to Digital Morning Message: Moving From the Tried and True to the New. *The Reading Teacher, 58*(8), 782-785.

McCarrick, K. &. (2007). Buried Treasure: The Impact of Computer Use on Young Children's Social, Cognitive, Language Development and Motivation. *AACE Journal, 15*(1), 73-95.

McManis, L. &. (2012). Finding the education in educational technology with early learners. *Young Children, 67*(3), 14-24.

MinnetonkaSchools. (2009, August 6). *Technology in Early Childhood Family Education Classrooms*. Retrieved from YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wOhb4n4ADbM

Seefeldt, C. (1989). Perspectives on the pledge of allegiance. *Childhood Education, 65*(3), 131-132.

Smith-Bonahue, T., Smith-Adcock, S., & Harman Ehrentraut, J. (2015). "I Won't Be Your Friend

     If You Don't!" Preventing and Responding to Relational Aggression in Preschool

     Classrooms. *Young Children*.

TEDx Talks. (2013, December 17). *Preschoolers and technology: Marli Hoffman at*

     TEDxJohannesburgWomen 2013. Retrieved from YouTube:

     https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fThJS7chYLc

Turja, L. E.-U. (2009). A conceptual framework for developing the curriculum and delivery of

     technology education in early childhood. *International Journal Of Technology And*

     Design Education, 19(4), 353-365.

Wang, F. K. (2010). Applying Technology in Inquiry-Based Learning in Early Childhood

     Education. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 37*(5), 381-389.