Media Literacy in Early Childhood
A Critical Conversation

Relationships are the foundation of media literacy. Children and adults can and should learn from and with one another in working toward an understanding of how digital devices can be used appropriately and intentionally to support learning.

"When we talk about media literacy, we also need to talk about the adults in children's lives. Each one is a potential 'media mentor.'"

Chip Donohue, PhD
Director, Erikson Institute's
Technology in Early Childhood Center

Teaching media literacy to young children requires adults to embrace and value curiosity, both in children and themselves, and understand that no one is an expert. Grasping the full potential the digital world holds for early learning is a process that leads from exploration to discovery, and along the way, it is important to never stop asking questions about the information we are reading online, what digital media can help accomplish, why it is being used, and what we can make with technology.

The idea of adults and children engaging in digital media together was at the heart of Media Literacy in Early Childhood: A Critical Conversation, a symposium at Erikson Institute on June 26, 2017 hosted by Erikson's Technology in Early Childhood (TEC) Center in partnership with the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE). The symposium preceded NAMLE's 2017 national conference, providing discussion topics throughout the week.

"Media literacy is power in the digital age."

Faith Rogow, PhD
Media Literacy Education Strategist,
Insighters Educational Consulting

The Ecosystem of Media Literacy in Early Childhood

Throughout the day, a child encounters digital media in many places. It's important that adults in all these settings are educated in media literacy to help meaningfully integrate technology into the child's experience.

Home → Early Childhood Programs, Schools & Family Child Care Providers → Libraries → Museums → Faith-Based Organizations → Community/After-School Programs
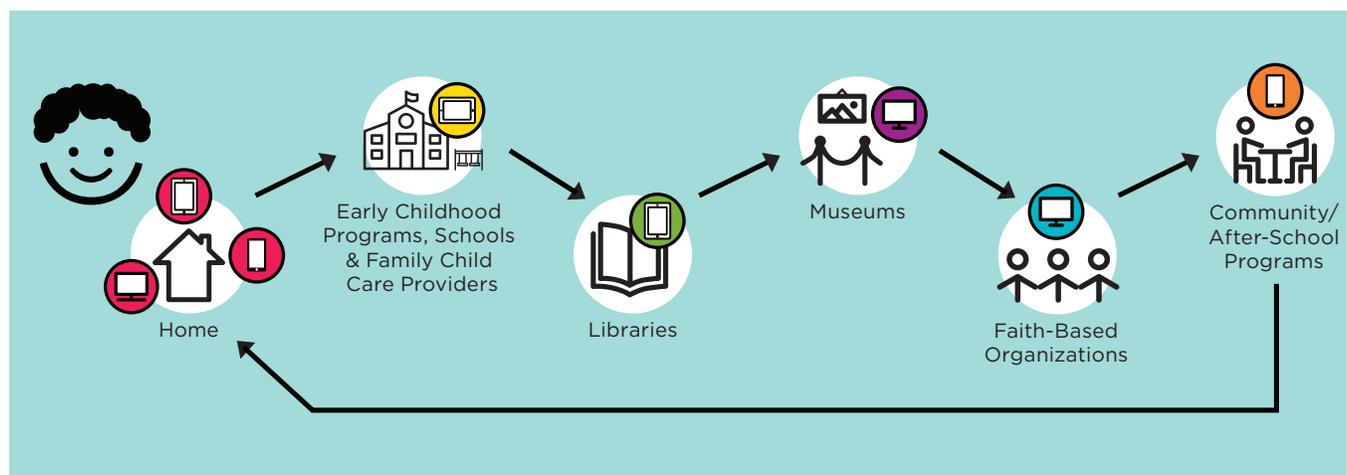
Seventy-five educators, policymakers, and media developers from national and local community organizations gathered to discuss and develop solutions to ensure all young children, birth to age 8, and the adults in their lives receive media literacy education in all of the learning environments in which they spend their days, including early childhood programs, schools, libraries, museums, after-school programs, and home.

Just as important as fostering relationships in media literacy is a need to close the "digital divide," the disparity between families who regularly use and create with digital media and those who lack access. The latter not only encounter barriers to technology and the internet but also to opportunities to learn how digital tools can help them access information, find community resources, and create.

Technology is not a privilege but a platform for families and communities to learn together, share their experiences and voices, make and create

"A child's mentor should be a local person who lives in that community."

**Shimira Williams
Integration Specialist, TEKStart**

media, and locate resources, such as education, food services, financial help, and housing assistance. We must acknowledge systemic gaps in equity and access to technology and media education while making a commitment that every young child will have a media literate adult in his or her life to guide curiosity, inquiry, and creation with media and technology tools.

Our 2017 symposium helped foster numerous ideas that can help advance the media literacy conversation and lead to real solutions that shape how digital media literacy education is incorporated into early childhood settings.

5 Essential Media Literacy Questions

Asking these questions is the first step toward strengthening media literacy in the early years.
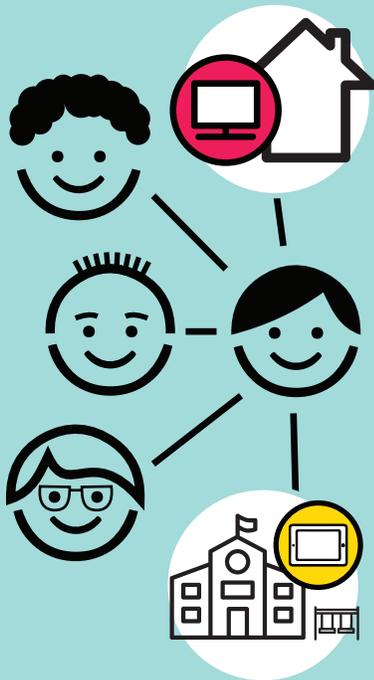
1. What habits of mind, competencies, and dispositions must children and the adults in their lives have to begin learning and applying media literacy in appropriate ways in the early years?

2. How do we help young children build a framework for technology fluency and media literacy that helps them move from media consumers to media creators?

3. How do we strengthen the technology fluency and media literacy of parents, educators, and other adults in young children's lives?

4. How can we create a vision for a new media literacy ecology that connects partners, practices, and solutions and helps children, families, and communities overcome barriers?

5. How can media literacy initiatives and practices address equity, access, and the digital use divide while also reflecting how young children use the same media technologies for different purposes in their homes and early childhood settings?

Erikson Institute
Technology in Early Childhood Center

NAMLE
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR MEDIA LITERACY EDUCATION