

Can AI aid the early education workforce? ^[1]

During a panel at SXSW EDU 2024, early education leaders discussed the potential of AI to support and empower the adults who help our nation's youngest children.

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AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

Excerpts

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While the vast majority of the conversations about AI in education have centered on K-12 and higher education, few have considered the potential of this innovation in early care and education settings.

At the conference, a panel of early education leaders gathered to do just that, in a session exploring the potential of AI to support and empower the adults who help our nation's youngest children, titled, "ChatECE: How AI Could Aid the Early Educator Workforce."

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At a time when early childhood educators are experiencing a host of challenges — from burnout, to low pay, to understaffed programs — the panelists discussed ways that AI can safely and effectively free up educators' time and lend them more support.

Michelle Kang, CEO of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), a professional membership organization that promotes high quality early learning for all children, noted that AI can save educators time by helping them write weekly newsletters to families.

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Hau shared that K-12 educators are using the technology to improve efficiency in a number of ways, including to draft individualized education programs (IEPs), create templates for communicating with parents and administrators, and in some cases, to support building lesson plans.

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"I would love to see that happening a little bit more in the early years, because if we could save some of our early educators time — to spend even more time with our little ones — I think we would all benefit," Hau said.

Kang also pointed out that generative AI can be used to overcome language barriers — for example, by providing live translation services during a meeting or translating written communication into a language spoken by a child's family before sending it.

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Celia Stokes, president of product at Teaching Strategies, shared that her company — which provides early childhood curriculum, assessment, professional learning and family engagement solutions — is focused on practical applications of AI so early childhood educators have more time to focus on building strong relationships with children, which no technology can begin to replace.

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So if an early childhood educator sees that AI can save her meaningful amounts of time — time that she can then channel back into direct, quality interactions with the children in her care — then she is likely to become interested in it.

The panelists agreed that, even if there are opportunities for AI to aid early childhood educators, every step to integrate it must be measured, intentional and appropriate.

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Panelists raised concerns as well: What are the ethical guidelines? What source data is being used? What are the privacy and safety implications, for adults and children? When so many other technologies — and so many existing systems in the United States — are already inherently inequitable, will AI only exacerbate that?

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Region: United States ^[3]

Tags: early childhood educators ^[4]

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