

Is early childhood education ready for AI? ^[1]

The field is just getting started with artificial intelligence, but experts say to be cautious about student privacy and potential bias

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Interest in artificial intelligence has surged among K-12 and college educators, who are looking at ways it can be used to support both students and teachers. But in the early childhood arena, those discussions are still in the beginning stages.

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Are there any specific ways you're seeing AI technology emerge in early childhood classrooms?

Hau: At Stanford, we have one super interesting project that is not necessarily in a classroom but could be in a classroom context. It's a tool my colleague, Dr. Philip Fisher, has developed called FIND that looks at child-adult interactions and takes video of that interaction. It is very expensive for humans to look at those videos and analyze the special moments in those interactions. Now, artificial intelligence is able to at least take a first pass at those interactions in a much more efficient manner. FIND is now an application for early childhood educators; it used to be mostly for parents, initially.

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When you look up AI tools or products for early educators online, a lot comes up. Is there anything you would be cautious about?

Hau: While I'm excited about the potential, there are lots of risks. And here we are speaking about little ones, so the risks are even heightened. I'm excited about the potential for those technologies to support adults – I have a lot of questions about exposing young children.

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Are there any other ways you could see AI used to fill a need in early childhood?

Hau: Right now, a lot of parents are struggling to find care. You have people who are providing care – it could be center, it could be home-based, nanny, preschool, Head Start, you have all these different types. And then you have families. It's a mess right now – the connection between the two. Of course it's a mess because we don't have enough funding, we don't have enough slots, but generally, it's a mess. This is an area that, over time, I'm hoping there will be better solutions powered by technology.

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