



## PLAYGROUP AND KINDERGARTEN TV AND ELECTRONIC MEDIA POLICY

Television is embedded in our culture and taken for granted to such a degree that it is often difficult for us to question its value. Similarly, with the increasing prominence of cinema, computers and computer games and their adoption into everyday life, rarely is a dissenting voice heard. However it is widely held amongst those involved in Steiner education, as well as, by researchers in many countries that watching TV and videos and playing computer games is detrimental to the healthy development of the child.

We expect parents to take note of suggestions from teachers if we find that children's behaviour and social integration is being affected by what they are watching, and to adhere as far as possible to the electronic media policy at Michael Oak.

### **The reasons for this are:**

1. At the time of birth many of the vital organs are not yet fully formed. Their healthy development is gradually completed through physical nourishment and through the child's experience of its own movements and the feedback gained through sense impressions. These are particularly important for neurological development, on which the ability for intellectual learning later depends. Watching a TV screen inhibits all movements, but most disastrously it causes eye-focus to be fixed rigidly at the distance of the screen, while the illusion of a three-dimensional picture is presented. On the objective level of sense impressions this is a lie, which can cause subconscious confusion to the nervous system, while preventing the movement and feedback, which would provide a natural correction. When such things are experienced frequently at a young age, inner habits are formed which can become stumbling blocks for conceptual learning.
2. Young children learn by imitation and take all sense-impressions deeply into their being. Play and amusement are not just time-fillers. The first-hand experiences they bring are the joyful means of developing the child's faculties for doing, feeling and thinking. All sense-impressions are food for the growth of both body and soul and children trustfully welcome whatever loved adults bring them. Many well-meaning adults do not realise the extent of their children's dependence in this respect. Once it is realised that up to age 8 or 9 to see is to subconsciously imitate, one sees in a new light the effect of the caricatures and stereotypes which pervade so many "innocent" programmes.
3. Through our education, we encourage children's natural capacity to be highly sensitive to their environment and the people around them. They are, therefore, deeply susceptible to being mesmerised; they cannot filter their absorption of the things they see and hear. We are careful in both the kindergarten and school to present material in a way appropriate to their age and sensibilities. By contrast, frequently, the quality of children's material on TV, videos and computers is very poor. They force images and noises of all kinds upon the



child which are in our view inappropriate – the children may become desensitised as their threshold for violence, noise, aesthetics, moral and social behaviour is lowered. Young children do not have the discrimination to regulate their own watching. They are not yet able to know what is good for them and what is not and they depend on the adults around them to decide the boundaries, which will protect them (in all areas of life, not just this one) until they can freely take care of themselves.

4. All children have an innate imaginative capacity and their natural state is to be active in this. As they do so, it is a capacity, which is usually lost or transformed, never to be re-lived in the same way. The effect of TV, videos and/or computer games is to make children unhealthily 'still' and stifle their own imaginations. By presenting the child with 'finished' images, the child is required to do no inner work (or active play) at all and their imagination is 'disabled' whilst watching. Afterwards, this can result in listlessness, lack of initiative and boredom; children may need to be constantly entertained. Alternatively, it may result in children being over-stimulated to such an extent that they can no longer listen properly to real people – they switch on or off as they please. It is felt that this kind of stimulation is in fact *deprivation* for the child's own abundant creative abilities.
5. Furthermore, the images that flash past on the screen are not connected to real life – they are an artificial representation of life and, as such, abstract. One cannot *relate* to TV. By contrast, in a Steiner school, the teachers do not use textbooks; they seek to give stories and lesson content from memory so that the communication exchange is real and alive. Children live vividly in the present and to be healthy they need to feel deeply connected to the world around them. They do not have the intellectual sophistication to cope healthily with this abstract phenomenon. Television and computer games literally undo the work we do at our school.

We would ideally like all TVs to be gathering dust under a cloth in the cupboard or to be thrown away completely! However, recognising that this is unlikely, **we request that children attending our kindergarten do not watch TV from Sunday to Thursday. They should *definitely* not watch TV in the mornings before coming to school.**

If your child is used to a heavy diet of television watching, don't despair! It may be easier than it sounds to change your family routine. Many of us have discovered that one-time TV addicts have found a wealth of positive things to do in the creative and supportive atmosphere of a Steiner school community.

6. Most of the above points also apply to computer games, with an additional dimension to be considered. The computer does respond in its own way and the type of linear thinking it demands has little to do with human interactions or with a child's natural mode of experience. It is undeniable that computers are of great practical use for specialised tasks in adult life. However, for normally healthy children, who are still finding their place in a three-dimensional world and learning to relate to fellow human beings in a socially harmonious way, computer games confine their developing faculties and alienate them from live realities.



# Michael Oak Waldorf School

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7. Concern regarding these activities is not restricted to Waldorf schools. Many people who work with children are becoming increasingly concerned that TV, video and computer games are associated with an increase in significantly disturbed behaviour among some children.
8. An experienced teacher can tell almost immediately by a child's behaviour whether he or she has been watching TV or playing computer games. We ask you, as parents, to act in support of our efforts to provide a truly human-centered education and to protect your children from harm caused by the electronic media.