

Three Cedars Waldorf School – Approach to Media

Since the creation of the first Waldorf School in 1919 society has evolved very rapidly, thanks to the many advances in science and technology which we enjoy today. Yet technology and electronic media are a very recent addition to the human experience, and their impact on the development of children has not yet been completely assessed and understood. Waldorf Schools, on the ground of the profound understanding of child development combined with decades of observation and experience, universally choose to keep electronic media at a distance. In addition to reserving the classroom use of computers and recorded sounds and images for the high school years, our strong advocacy for a media-free childhood places Waldorf Education and our school in an anachronistic position which deserves further elaboration.

Effects of Media

Television and movies increasingly provide quality entertainment and informative content, and internet, email, and online social networks can be attractive and convenient improvements to our modern lives. They also bring a degree of awareness of the world which our school feels children should be introduced to cautiously, and within the context of strong parental guidance. Perhaps more importantly than content, and particularly for young children, the use of electronic media and its impact on the physical, cognitive, and spiritual development of children is of primary concern to us.

The passivity inherent in watching television, playing video games, or listening to recorded music is increasingly recognized by educators, parents, and the medical profession as counterproductive to our children's learning process and of their balanced development. The fast-paced and fragmented nature of the screen offerings hinders the cultivation of concentration and imagination. Beyond their now well-known negative effects - child obesity, desensitization to violence and stereotypes, vulnerability to commercial messages - electronic media negatively alter the child's perception of reality. Young children need direct interactions with parents and caregivers as a basis for healthy brain growth and the development of appropriate social, emotional, and cognitive skills. As the child gets older, direct, hands-on interactions with other human beings, the environment, and with nature remain critical to their well-being. The passive consumption of electronic media does not support these connections, which our school considers to be essential for healthy development.

School Recommendation

We continue to find that students who are repeatedly exposed to electronic media - through television, recorded music, computer use, phones, and all other 'things with screens' - are robbed of the experience of deep listening, observation, and full engagement essential to our classroom life and social development. We recognize that our school's approach in this area can be demanding for some families, and that a time of transition and adaptation is often necessary for children and parents alike. We are committed to working closely with parents throughout their child's education by providing articles, presentations, and discussions on these topics to further our shared understanding of our children's deepest needs in this age of electronics, technology, and information. The specific requests for different age groups included below form the basis of the school's regular conversations with parents on this topic, conveyed primarily by teachers in the context of Parent Evenings and Parent-Teacher conferences, and class agreements. Additionally, when from our perspective the use of media negatively impacts a student's learning and social life, we may choose to draft a student-specific 'plan of intervention', specifically articulating the school's recommendations and desired outcome so as to more effectively guide parents and student(s) towards the 'unplugged' lifestyle most supportive of their significant investment in Waldorf education.

Early Childhood Classes and Grades 1-5

Our early childhood programs are steeped in meaningful imaginative play, while our grade school programs greatly rely on the capacity for imagination and empathy. As parents of young children, we strongly recommend that you resist the convenience of television, movies, video games, and computer games, and involve your children in a daily routine including as much meaningful play and activities as possible. Many families find that the complete elimination of electronic media greatly enhances the quality of their home-life and relationships. We fully endorse this approach as the most consistent with your choice of Waldorf education. As a cohesive and supportive complement to our pedagogical work with your children, we request that you **completely eliminate exposure to media for students in Preschool through Grade five.**

Grades 6 – 8

As students' physical and emotional development is well underway, the impact of electronic media increasingly lies in the area of social and spiritual development. We recognize the benefits of an occasional television or movie viewing for students of this age, both in the development of their awareness and understanding of the world, and in the quality of conversations that follows. We view the use of electronic media at this age in the context of the development of the cognitive capacities of our students, and aim at guiding our students towards an increased degree of discernment and understanding of electronic media as a resource and a tool, rather than as a cultural authority or for sheer entertainment.

The social development that takes place in the context of a Waldorf classroom and school is such that we view the potential benefits of electronic social networking as minimal. We recommend that students not be permitted to engage in electronic social networking until their high school years, and that the viewing of movies and television programs be carefully selected and limited so as to not hinder the students' artistic, physical, and academic engagement. **We request that you eliminate exposure to electronic media during the weeks when school is in session.**

High School

Our students may choose to continue their Waldorf Education in the high school years by joining the Seattle Waldorf High School, where television, movies, and computers are integrated in the curriculum as one of many resources available for comprehensive research and study. The high school provides each student with an email account, and makes use of the effective tools provided by computers and the internet. At this stage, students are eager to be active participants in society, and the high school views the introduction of electronic media as an enhancement to their studies and a necessary step towards the mastery of the tools of our age. The use of electronic media in the classrooms is occasional, as the curriculum is largely presented by the teachers through direct engagement with their students. The high school continues to guide the students towards an understanding of electronic media as a resource rather than an authority, and strongly recommend that parents supervise their student closely in their use of email and social network, and their choice of entertainment media through open conversations and clear family guidelines, and that parents limit exposure to media on school days so as to support their student's full engagement in school work and activities.

An Invitation to participate in our ongoing conversation

Your regard for the well-being of your child has led you to choose a Waldorf school for his or her education and for a community supportive of your family values. We greatly value your commitment and your concerns for your child's social integration and for ensuring that he or she is well prepared for higher education and the adult world. The pressures of the world of electronic media acting on our children and families are strong and sustained. Our children continue to be the targeted focus of marketing and commercial campaigns which can lead us to question our own personal or collective observations and wisdom, despite mounting evidence of the harmful effects of electronic media exposure for young children. We invite you to join us in becoming an active participant in the conversation about media, and to be in touch with your child's teachers as well as the school's director, to further our shared understanding of this ever-prevalent element in today's culture and society.