

## Media in Early Childhood

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Hardly any question polarizes our kindergartens and schools as much as that of the media. The Corona era has brought the media even more into the foreground and made them more self-evident. This makes it all the more important to ask what kind of living environment we want to create for our children. Are we as Waldorf teachers, as mothers or fathers, for or against the use of media? Answering this is seemingly simple at first. "Media-free" early childhood is the best preparation for discernment and thus later media maturity. Ultimately, however, it is the wrong question if we look at the reality of life today. What is true to life, but also uncomfortable about a pedagogical practice that changes with the course of a child's life, is that there is precisely no dogma, but rather many factors and parameters. These include the age and constitution of the child, the social and cultural environment, the living conditions and habits of the parents or the patchwork family.

### What is needed?

I would like to mention two of the four virtues that Rudolf Steiner offers us in the founding course of the first Waldorf school in 1919 in this context. Even though Steiner is speaking to teachers, the statements are valid for everyone involved in education:

"The teacher should be a person who is interested in everything worldly and human" (in: *The Foundations of Human Experience*)

"The teacher should be a person who never compromises with untruth in his inner being" (in: *Practical Advice to Teachers*). And two years later he said: "For the soul-spiritual, using the means of transport or other means without knowing the basic elements - means to be blind. Just as a blind man walks through the world without knowing the effects of light, people today walk blindly through the world of culture because they do not see and have not been given the opportunity to understand things. This is a soul-spiritual defect."

Adults who do not move blindly through the world, but who understand it, know their way around and can also handle technical devices confidently, give children a feeling of security in life. Facing life without fear is

being a role model for self-confident learning and fear-free action.

### **Be truthful and don't be afraid**

Being "against screens" for as long as they have existed has been a justifiable educational approach to preserving childhood and free play. Only sensory experiences form the basis for memory, fantasy and the capacity for imagination. Nevertheless, one needs to be a contemporary and not be afraid of the world. I remember well a boy who confided his great secret to me during eurythmy therapy: "I found a television set in the junkyard and I hid it in the cellar and it still works! "And what do your parents say about it?" "They don't even know what a TV set looks like!"

Or when we accept children to school, they ask: "Why can't I go to school here if I tell you that I watch my favorite TV series every night?"

An open dialogue with parents, an active educational partnership, and an honest acceptance of one's habits are important foundations for cooperation between the home and the kindergarten or school.

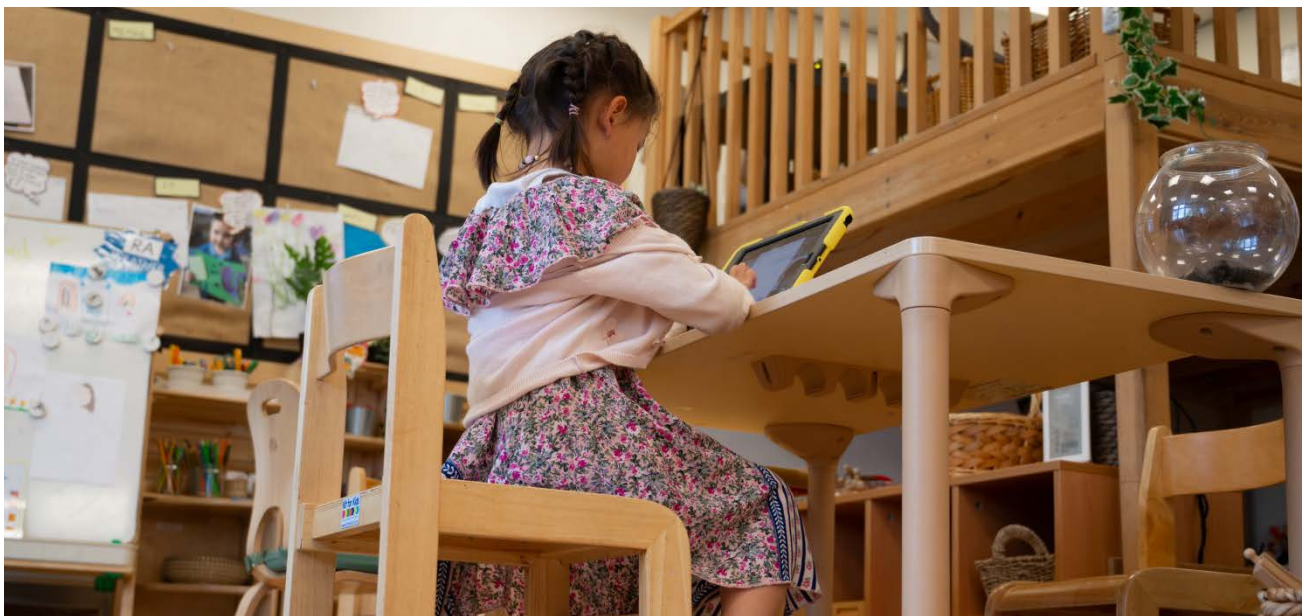
If untruthfulness is living between adults, this is more detrimental to the moral development of the child than the media, which are part of the world around us. Open dialogue among all those involved in education creates trust, which is a prerequisite for the children's security of attachment.

### **Everything in its own time**

In Waldorf education, very differentiated attention is paid to the specific development in each respective phase of life. I would like to illustrate this with a few examples.

Mobiles are very popular: above the baby's crib, above the changing table - out of reach for the baby, not to be grasped, but always in the field of vision. A mobile inserts itself into the focus of the child while diapers are changed, and is an obstacle to seeing the face of the parents, to reading facial expressions and gestures, to the actions that, together with the voice, create a collective impression of joint activity. It interferes with the development of hand-eye coordination, with being by oneself and with learning to relate in being together. This is true even for plant-dyed silk fairies. However, not all Waldorf teachers are always and for life against mobiles - they are only inappropriate when changing diapers and above the crib.

The same applies to the hand puppet. With children in childcare, the puppet only causes irritation, since the speaker and the puppet are separated. In the phase of fantasy, however, the children slip into the hand puppet full of joy and then also invent stories themselves. With cognitive development at preschool age, children understand metaphors, invent their own and new play on words or joke arises.



### **When is it time for media?**

Here it is important to differentiate between the parental home and kindergarten. In the latter, the motto is "cell phone-free for all."

Having a cell phone "garage" in the office for staff and parents during the familiarization process guarantees real cell phone-free time in the group room, because when muted cell phones vibrate in their pockets, stress is written all over the adults' faces.

It goes without saying that a cell phone is taken along on forest day to get help in an emergency. But almost all kindergartens have a secretary's office and an answering machine, and not every message has to be read and processed immediately during the main childcare hours. We were well organized and viable even before the days of cell phones!

And at home, how does it look there? An example from a family at the time of the lockdown: Grandma wanted to visit for the Easter holidays. She was isolated in a nursing home in the USA and the daughter lives in Germany - a single parent. Every morning she had a video conference in her home office to coordinate tasks with her colleagues. Luckily there was still an old laptop at home. Grandma could read aloud and talk to her granddaughter about what she had read and everything that moved her via video link. Yes, real contact is better, but the alternative would have been no contact at all. Reading aloud is better than watching a movie. There is no substitute for a conversation about what was read aloud. Mom was able to have her video conference in the background, and playing alone then rarely works out ... And grandma and granddaughter had a common fixed point in the day, to which they could both look forward.

Activities to which we can all joyfully say yes, even in our free time, need to be shared in order to create both a rich environment and a peaceful climate in which our children grow up. A jointly agreed-upon "no" to media consumption that is not yet age-appropriate strengthens and relieves every family. When "everyone else is allowed to except me!" comes up, it is possible to react confidently. It is important to find out how much media is really necessary at what age, taking into account the circumstances of life, and how many and what alternatives there are. However, this can only be experienced and discussed if there is an honest exchange. It is best for the children when parents and Waldorf educators work together openly on their common approach. We can only find out together how to create the best possible environment for the children through open dialogue. In this respect, we need a media protection plan for the children and media maturity among the adults. A "no" or a "yes" based on expertise, not fear, has the power of persuasion, and media literacy is exemplified to children by parents and educators who are media literate. Sovereignty that comes from solid knowledge radiates contemporaneity and life security. And it is convincing.

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#### **Literature:**

R. Steiner. *The Foundations of Human Experience*, GA 293,  
ibid. *Practical Advice to Teachers*, GA 294, Dornach 1990  
ibid. *Education for Adolescents*, GA 302, 16.6.1921

#### **Links:**

P. Martzog, S. Suggate: Screen-time influences children's mental imagery performance  
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/desc.12978>

[www.kinderaerzte-im-netz.de/mediathek/familienzeit-gesund-gestalten/medienmuendigkeit](http://www.kinderaerzte-im-netz.de/mediathek/familienzeit-gesund-gestalten/medienmuendigkeit)