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### Why We Don't Use Computers in Our Classrooms

Children at Downtown Little School do not use computers; and we believe that time spent looking at screens of all kinds should be carefully limited.

Young children learn through play. When they manipulate materials such as blocks, paints, clay, crayons, dolls or toy cars, they have a chance to learn about cause and effect. They learn a sense of mastery and pride in their abilities as they create buildings, paintings or stories. They stretch their imaginations as they invent plots for their games. They may discover and begin to understand the meaning of number; that two always means two whether you are talking about Legos or crackers. They may learn about colors and how to mix them. They learn about social roles as they imitate parents, teachers and other grownups. As they interact with each other, they must learn to express themselves verbally in more and more complex ways. They learn to read body language, facial expressions, as well as understanding an always expanding vocabulary. They begin to understand and even modulate their own emotions and in so doing may begin to appreciate the emotions of other children and adults.

Needless to say, this is just the beginning of what young children at play may learn and we haven't even begun to discuss the value of books and music or outdoor play. Young children at school, experiencing group life and structure, young children at home, experiencing some degree of solitude and freedom, have a lot to learn. The important learning at this age is social and emotional learning that lays a foundation for successful academic learning. Children are always thinking, always learning and they do so most effectively when they are interacting with adults, with other children and with concrete materials.

Young children learn with all their senses. They need to move, to see, to hear, to touch and to interact with others in order truly to understand experience. While computers, iPads and smartphones may be more interactive than television, they still have the effect of shutting out the world instead of inviting

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it in. The child who walks down a busy block, or down a grocery store aisle, who watches a street sweeper pass by or who asks a parent, "Why?" is absorbing important information about the world by being an active part of it. A child who is looking at a screen is inevitably missing out.

Finally, the capacity of screens to distract can get in the way of a child's development of important inner resources. Using screens to magically prevent boredom, sadness, anger, or anxiety deprives children of the chance to learn how to experience those feelings in a healthy way.

It is easy for us to keep screens out of the classroom where there is so much to keep the children occupied. We certainly know how useful screens can be at home to occupy children for a time while adults are busy or need a break. Having a designated time of day for limited TV or computer time makes sense for many families; but, we encourage parents to use screens sparingly and instead encourage children's rich experience of the real world.

Meredith & Kate