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**TECH TOYS DEFINITELY HAVE** THEIR SPACE, GIVEN THE AGE WE LIVE IN. **BUT TO ME, THEY ARE** SUPPLEMENTARY — **HUMAN INTERACTION** IS STILL THE MOST IMPORTANT.

//Mr Chong Wee Jin

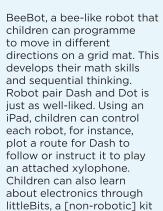
self-regulation of behaviour and perseverance. As the toys are shared among pre-schoolers at our centre, children have more opportunities to think and problem-solve as a group.

## Tell us about the toys used at PLAY@TP. How do teachers incorporate these into their lesson plans?

Ava: From January to March 2015, we conducted a Proofof-Concept exercise with IDA to test the tech toys at our centre. The toys were found to be challenging for Nursery children so we integrated the toys into our K1 and K2 curriculum instead. Our aim is to give children tactile and meaningful play activities so they can relate what they learn in class to real-life experiences. The teachers, too, play an important role in facilitating and guiding the children's learning while they are engaged with the tovs. It gives children the opportunity to discuss, clarify, ask questions and problem-solve. This develops their thinking further. After all, research says that the social context is important for learning.

One of the most popular toys is the

Tech toys like these BeeBots make learning fun for children. 2



made up of circuit pieces

the toys into their curriculum.

PLAY@TP will also share

their learning experiences

with these centres.

that can be fitted together in various ways. Our K1 children created electrical circuits to add lights and helicopter propellers to their art-andcraft projects.

## Parents, where do you stand on the value of tech tovs relative to traditional forms of play?

Saanthivah: We live in a high-tech world so it is important for children to be familiar with technology. The robotic toys at PLAY@ TP are good because they also support children's creativity and imagination, and engage them socially with their peers.

> Wee Jin: Tech toys definitely have their space, given the age we live in. But to me, they are supplementary human interaction is still the most important. Many iPad and mobile games can be played alone, so

In January 2016, IDA's PlayMaker Programme was rolled out to 160 pre-schools island-wide. Besides being equipped with tech-enabled toys, educators at the pilot centres will receive ongoing tech support and attend workshops on how to integrate



## Cover STORY



there is not much chance to interact to form strong bonds and relationships.

(PLAY@TP)

## What tovs do your child usually play with at home?

**Saanthiyah:** Dhana usually plays with building bricks and puzzles, either alone or with her younger brother. But she has started to become interested in tech toys since using them at school. Her favourite is the BeeBot as she has a knack for calculations. I have begun to shop around for a suitable and affordable tech toy, although I haven't found one yet.

Wee Jin: Our family time is spent playing card games or board games like Scrabble Junior and Snakes and Ladders. I plan to stick to

games for as long as I can — that is until Sophie grows bored of them. She also likes to sing, and often engages in friendly banter with her younger sister over who is the better singer!

Ms Wang, do you agree that tech toys are supplementary rather than essential play tools? Could they do more harm than good, if used excessively?

Ava: In the case of iPads or other tech toys that involve screen time, absolutely! We are all social beings so young children must have a firm foundation in interacting with people. If children are introduced to

these screen-based tech toys at an early age, they may spend less time interacting with others. As a result, they may grow up not knowing how to hold a conversation, interact or read people's expressions — and that is very worrying.

Out of the six tech tovs at our centre, only two require the use of an iPad. Parents should also have control over such devices at home to limit their child's screen time. Building relationships with children can be done through something as simple as reading a book together. You do not need tech toys to do so.

Parents, how do you make sure your child does not spend too much time at home playing with screenbased tech toys?

Wee Jin: I limit Sophie's iPad time to one hour a day. She can choose whether she wants to spend that hour watching videos or playing

educational

games like

54, PRINCIPAL,

PLAY@TP



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//Ms Ava Wang

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Lim, a Senior Lecturer at SIM University who specialises in early childhood education, favours robotic toys over screen-based tech games - and not just because the latter can be addictive. "Two-dimensional screen swiping does not engage young children as much as three-dimensional robotic manipulatives that small hands can actually hold and move around or command with a remote control," says Dr Lim. Robots also offer more opportunities for social play, can teach children basic programming or coding skills, and provide greater motivation for them to problem-solve or think

Like Ms Wang, Dr Sirene

logically. That said, the use of tech toys — which are generally on the expensive side — is but one pedagogical approach. Low- or non-tech options offer more affordable ways to facilitate children's learning and development. As Dr Lim explains, "Tech toys do not do everything for a child's growth. In particular, they do not replace physical play which young children need to flourish and develop holistically into happy, healthy, curious individuals."

For example, Dr Lim suggests giving children

When learning how to control robots Dash and Dot using an iPad app, Play @TP students problem-solve as a group.



wooden, architectural unit blocks so they can work on block-building projects. This encourages self-directed learning, develops their math and engineering skills, and improves their hand-eye coordination. They can even construct something new out of discarded objects and loose parts such as cardboard boxes of various sizes, newspaper, string, fabric and bottles. "All families should provide young children with a variety of play opportunities," she says. "The quality of play is not determined by the cost of the play opportunity."



