



the discovery center

A Note from George Miller

September 2023

Dear TDC Families,

Welcome to our new school year at The Discovery Center. This is a very special year for us: it begins our 50th year of serving families in the Ann Arbor area. In honor of this milestone, I wanted to provide a brief summary of our history and ongoing activities.

TDC began operations in August 1974, founded by my late wife, Jacki Miller. Since September 1984, we have operated in our current building, which was designed specifically for our program. Since November 1990 (for nearly 33 years!), the program has been directed by Debbie Belcher, who has worked closely with me to pursue Jacki's vision of providing high-quality child care to families in the greater Ann Arbor community. I'm very grateful to Debbie and the rest of our amazing staff (both past and present) for not only sustaining the best child care program in the Ann Arbor area (in my biased opinion), but also adding new features to our program to keep it current and fresh. Recent additions, developed in collaboration with our long-standing architect, include newly revamped classroom playgrounds and the nature playground behind our building.

You may have noticed that, in celebration of our 50th year, we have spruced up our big yellow sign in the front yard of the center where, years ago, families began what is now an ongoing tradition of photographing their children at the start and end of their TDC experiences. You might want to check out the timeline that Debbie has placed on the lobby wall, showing in pictures and news clippings our long and rich history. Stay tuned for information about future activities that we are planning to celebrate our 50 years.

We are grateful to you and the broader community for your continuing support.

George Miller
Owner

COMING EVENTS...STORYTELLING WITH LAURA

Thursday, September 7th
10:00 am
Storytelling with Laura
in the Lobby
Yellow Room, Green Room

Thursday, September 14th
10:00 am
Storytelling with Laura
in the Lobby
Blue Room, Purple Room

Thursday, September 21st
10:00 am
Storytelling with Laura
in the Lobby
Red Room and Orange Room



10 THINGS NOT TO WORRY ABOUT WHEN YOUR CHILD STARTS SCHOOL



Don't Worry if, in the next few weeks, your child:

- 1- **Brings home sheet after sheet of easel paper completely covered with greenish-brown paint:** Don't worry, he's not depressed. It's just one of the earliest stages of painting. To kids, it's a major accomplishment to cover the entire sheet of paper. They also like to paint one color over another...resulting in that murky shade of brown. It may not look like much, but it takes tremendous amounts of concentration to do that!
- 2- **Brings home a paper covered with twenty pounds of glue and one tiny scrap of blue construction paper:** Most kids concentrate on mastering one skill at a time when doing projects. Attaching actual items to the paper will be more interesting once she's thoroughly figured out the glue bottle's possibilities, besides, squeezing the glue bottle is great fun and good for small muscle development!
- 3- **Doesn't bring home any artwork at all:** There are so many interesting things to do, and they're every bit as worthwhile, you just can't hang them on the refrigerator.
- 4- **Claims she isn't going to be invited to someone's birthday party:** Birthday parties are the standard preschool bargaining chip as in "If you don't give me a turn on the tire swing right now, I won't invite you to my birthday party". Rest assured that such threats have nothing to do with the actual party!
- 5- **Is unusually obnoxious at home:** Kids make real effort to behave well at school for the first few weeks. Meanwhile at home, where they feel safe, they let it all out. Don't worry, their refined company manners will wear off as soon as they feel comfortable at school, and they won't need to bring all those pent up feelings home to you.
- 6- **Won't tell you anything about what he did at school:** Some like to keep home and school separate. Others find it confusing to try to summarize a day's events. Try asking about specifics, if you are really curious, feel free to ask your child's teacher.
- 7- **Can't name any of the other kids in her class:** There's so much that's new and so many kids. Teachers will help the children learn each other's names once they're sure everyone knows the more vital things...like where the bathrooms is and when is snack time!
- 8- **Comes home in "school pants" because somehow he got wet:** See number 7. Don't worry accidents happen. Teachers are used to changing children. The child size drinking fountains are also a main contributor to wet clothes!
- 9- **Starts acting wild and racing around the room the minute you come in to pick her up:** Some kids wonder exactly who is in charge when both parent and teacher are present. Acting up is one way to find out. Confer with the teachers to work out who is calling the shots.
- 10- **Says he isn't going back to school tomorrow:** Around the second month of school, reality sets in. It dawns on your child that you actually expect her to go to school each and every week. Even kids who love school sometimes raise objections. Remain matter of fact and confident as you send him off. It may help out to remind yourself that you aren't the only parent whose child has come down with the "please let me stay at home blues".

CAN PLAYING PREPARE CHILDREN FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS?

Imagine yourself standing just inside the doorway of a typical early childhood classroom. To your right, a group of children are playing with cars and trucks. Across the room a little girl has just taken a tub a Legos from the shelf. In front of you, two boys are about to make pretend birthday cakes with playdough. And to your left, a group is gathered around the sand table, digging and pouring. It all looks like fun, but will it help them get ready for elementary school? The answer is YES! The connection between play and later school success is strong, but often underestimated. It's sometimes easier to see how play supports physical or social/emotional development than how it builds a foundation for academic skills. But it does. And here are only a few examples:

Cars and Trucks— Figure-Ground Discrimination—the ability to pick out and concentrate on one item and separate it from the background. Arranging cars on a play mat in preschool, for example, builds a foundation for later being able to see a letter as part of a word or word as a meaningful part of a sentence. ***Visual Tracking—the ability to follow the movement of an object with one's eyes and guide it with one's hand.*** Practice in driving a toy truck along a road made of blocks helps to develop the coordination needed for guiding a pencil along a piece of paper. ***Grouping—the ability to figure out what characteristic several objects have in common.*** A child sorts through all the vehicles, searching for metal racing cars, rather than, say, plastic or wooden ones is preparing for mathematical set theory.

Shelf Toys (Legos, pegboards, beads, etc.) - Seriation—the ability to determine what comes next in a series. A child creating a predictable sequence with blocks or beads is practicing a valuable math skill needed for understanding number patterns. ***Constancy—the ability to understand that a particular characteristic such as color or shape stays the same, even when other characteristics change.*** A child stringing beads soon discovers that round beads are always round no matter what their color or size. That paves the way for understanding that "A" and "a" are all the same letter. ***Control of muscles in fingertips.*** Toys that must be fitted together, arranged, and taken apart offer opportunities for strengthening and developing the muscles that will eventually be used in writing.

Playdough—Matching—the ability to recognize how things correspond. A child who cuts a playdough shape with a cookie cutter and fits the shape back into the corresponding space is practicing a pre-reading skill that will enable them to discriminate differences and similarities among letters. ***Representation—the ability to see that one object can stand for or symbolize another.*** Knowing that a piece of playdough can represent a piece of pizza helps develop the idea that letters on a page can also represent real life.

It all sounds pretty serious, and that's for a good reason: Play is a young child's most critical pathway to learning. If your child's school provides plenty of time, materials, and support for play, you can relax. They understand how young children learn.