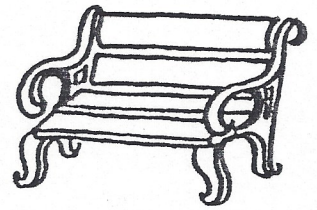


The Park Bench School of Parenting

Years ago parents got most of their child-rearing information from each other. Articles in the Park Bench School of Parenting are written to revive that custom. If you belong to a parents' group, use these articles as discussion starters. Or ask a friend what he or she would do in a similar situation. Listen to different viewpoints and decide for yourself what's best for your family.



But Aren't They Going to Teach Him Anything?

Blocks, toys, clay, and the sandbox. Stories, songs, puzzles and friends. Aren't they going to teach him anything at that preschool? Your next door neighbor's child is working on the letter of the week at her school. And what do you hear about from your son? Blocks, toys, clay, and the sandbox. Stories, songs, puzzles and friends. It's hard not to worry.

But you really don't need to. Young children's primary pathway to learning is play. Play supports development in all areas—physically, intellectually, emotionally and socially. Quality preschools take play seriously because they take children seriously. They understand how children learn.

When hearing your neighbor go on about the letter of the week becomes too much, take time to talk with other parents who also believe in play for young children. Some of them are sure to proudly mention their grade school age children who played as preschoolers—and are now doing just fine academically, thank you.

In the meantime, here are some examples of how the play materials in your child's preschool center or kindergarten help prepare him or her for later academic learning.

- Before a child can hold a pencil firmly and use it for long periods of time, he or she needs lots of opportunities to strengthen those pencil-holding muscles. Playdough, Lego, beads, and even the buttons and snaps on dress-up clothes can all do the trick.
- Before a child can understand that a combination of letters stands for a familiar object, he or she needs lots of experience in making

one thing stand for another. In play, a block can be a cup, or a slide can represent an icy mountain. Using objects as symbols in play is good preparation for later use of symbols in reading and math.

- Before a child can see any reason for studying hard, he or she needs to know that the world is filled with important and interesting ideas. Hands-on exploration and discovery makes children want to learn more. Problem solving through play builds habits of thoughts that children will use throughout life.
- Before a child can relax and learn in a classroom filled with other children, he or she needs lots of experience in the give and take of getting along with others. Feeling at ease in a group and knowing how to ask a teacher for help can go a long way in helping your child succeed and be happy in grade school.

Blocks, toys, clay, and the sandbox. Stories, songs, puzzles and friends. And time and encouragement to learn from them. If that's what your children have, don't worry. They're in a good place.

