

The EMU child care center offers tots educational opportunities that include...



Photo by Erich Boekelheide

More than just green play dough

The EMU child care center is more than kid-sized furniture, a big supply of green play dough, and field trips to places like Track Town Pizza.

It's not just a babysitting service, according to parents, caregivers, and work-study students.

Instead, it offers tots educational activities that range from practicing first aid on dolls to learning to help clean up after snack time.

But there's still time for "fun."

After all, Thumper the rabbit needs to be fed. So do the fish. There are clothes to dress up in, and play dough to flatten.

Just being on a University campus enables the children to take advantage of numerous learning experiences. Recent expeditions included visits to the science buildings, various museums, duck ponds, community gardens, a greenhouse, Leighton pool, and the University track.

Jane, a 4-year-old preschooler, spends part of the sunny afternoon with the other children, playing and learning in the outdoor area of the center.

Opened in the fall of 1975, the center was designed specifically for children, and looks it. Jane fits right in to her surroundings — a climbing structure, swings, trikes, toys. The whole area is set off from the rest of campus by a three-

foot, concrete wall, decorated with colored scrawlings of flowers and sunshine.

After a few minutes of running around, Jane settles down to color on a huge sheet of paper. "Please pass the green," she says to another child. Jane, with some assistance from the caregiver, proudly prints her name.

The children learn educational basics, says Karen Quigley, program director. It's a pre-kindergarten for some children, who can participate in planned activities to reinforce learning objectives such as numbers, colors and shapes. They also socialize and learn to share with one another, she says.

Nearby, some gleeful, red-footed children admire their foot-painting successes while Jessica, 4, spells her name in sign language.

In part, it is this stimulating, educational environment which makes the EMU program "exceptional in child care," Quigley says.

Right now Jane is more concerned with giggling and running after a boy on a trike than she is about the stimulating campus environment.

But the campus environment is there, and that's important to Dori Jung and her 2½-year-old son, Brandon.

"When I go to school, he comes, too."

she says. The environment here is a "microcosm" of the University environment, which she says is "more educationally stimulating" than babysitters.

The children are given some independence and aren't watched constantly. They can make their own decisions about what activities they will participate in. The center seldom has problems with this approach.

The program keeps the needs of parents in mind as well. Care is charged by the hour, rather than by the typical half or full day. This means parents only pay for child-care time they need, allowing them to spend as much time with their children as they can, she says.

"I can't imagine a better kind of day care service," says Wendy McKee, whose 2½-year-old daughter Gwen goes to the center. She says it makes it easier to be a student because of the center's convenience.

University students as a group, not simply the parents, benefit from having the care center here, Quigley says. For example, sociology, psychology, and physical education students use the center as a resource, often observing the children for class assignments. The center also currently employs 12 work-study students.

Story by Kevan Houser

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