

Fundamentals of Berkley's Approach

Young children are active and curious participants in the construction of their knowledge. The school is firmly embedded in constructivism; the theoretical view that learners construct knowledge through interactions with the physical and social environments. Teachers challenge children to make predictions, to explore, to discover, to question, to represent and to reorganize their ways of thinking. Understanding that the young child is a member of his or her family, it is our goal to collaborate with family members. Building an equal relationship between family, child and teacher is a cornerstone of our philosophy.

Children are capable and powerful human beings. They have the ability to research and question in order to gain further understanding of those things they desire to know more about. Teachers are not all-knowing individuals that give all the answers; they encourage children through investigation process.

At Berkley there are many opportunities for exploration, interaction and experimentation with peers and adults. Teachers recognize they can promote the

development of each child through expressions of respect, acceptance, and trust. Teachers engage in continuous discussion and interpretation of their work and the work of children. These exchanges provide ongoing training and theoretical enrichment. Teachers see themselves as researchers preparing documentation of their work with children, whom they also consider researchers.

The documentation as communication. Careful consideration and attention are given to the presentation of the thinking of the children and the adults who work with them. Teachers' commentary on the purposes of the study and the children's learning process, transcriptions of children's verbal language (i.e. words and dialogue), photographs of their activity, and representations of their thinking in many media are composed in carefully designed panels, blogs or books to present the process of learning in the schools. The documentation serves many purposes. It makes parents aware of their children's experience. It allows teachers to better understand children, to evaluate their own work, and to exchange ideas with other educators. Documentation also shows children that their work is valued.

Finally, it creates an archive that traces the history of the school and the pleasure in the process of learning experiences by many children and their teachers (Gandini, 1993).

At Berkley teachers work in pairs and collaborate with other teachers and staff members.

Professional development is critical to the quality of our program. To support our teacher's professional development, Berkley closes the second Friday of each month for Professional Development Day (PDD). The purpose for PDD is to continually increase the knowledge of the teachers and staff through on-going teacher education. Teachers see themselves as researchers through the use of documentation and gaining a deeper understanding of the children's work. They encourage children to hypothesize and predict, pose questions, defend and revise ideas research answers, and problem solve. Through meaningful and interesting activities with choices, children have the opportunities to function as planners. Critical thinking and problem solving skills are supported by giving children sufficient time to implement plans.

The Parent as partner. Parent participation is considered

essential and takes many forms. Parents play an active part in their children's learning experience and help ensure the welfare of all the children in the school. The ideas and skills that the families bring to the school and, even more important, the exchange of ideas between parents and teachers, favor the development of a new way of educating, which helps teachers to view the participation of families not as a threat but as an intrinsic element of collegiality and as the integration of different wisdoms (Spaggiari, 1993). Cadwell, L.B. 1997) *Bringing Reggio Emilia Home: An innovative approach to early childhood education.* New York: Teachers College Press