The Berkley Buzz Winter 2016
Volume 46 – The Environment as
The Third Teacher

A Note from Polly:

Welcome to 2016!

With the rush of the holidays over it is time to gear up for all the learning and fun activities that will take place at Berkley January through April. See the dates on the right regarding the Pancake Breakfast and first ever Family Dance Party!

In the last Berkley Buzz we talked about transforming relationships into partnerships. As the semester began, in September, the teachers focused their efforts on building a community as a sense of “place.” Their goal was/is for our classrooms to be intimate gathering places for the children. We want the children to feel secure, nurtured and supported by the environment, each other, and YOU. As we proceed with the school year, our focus is getting deeper, and we find ourselves investigating the meaning of “the environment as a third teacher”.

An important part of constructivist teaching and developmentally appropriate practice is understanding how children learn readily from their environment, and therefore the environment is the “third” teacher”. We want inspiring classroom environments that promote autonomy, creativity, thinking, problem solving and wonder. Fostering a love of learning is one of our biggest goals! The concept of the environment as the third teacher and participant in the children’s learning is an inspiration to us all. Well thought out environments designed for children to think and learn opens up possibilities for children’s engagement and calls on the teachers and adults in a program to create living space that actively participates in the educative process. Our ideas about these “lived spaces” have evolved and been influenced in different ways by educators such as Maria Montessori, Lev Vygotsky, Vivian Paley, Lories Malaguzzi and the schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy.

In this journey, to better explore the environment as the “third” teacher, we are asking ourselves:

- What spaces have we created for our students/children?
- Are they easily redefined to respond to student/child activity and interests?
- Are they provocative and suggestive without limiting engagement?
- Does the space/classroom allow us ample opportunities for loose parts play and or STEM?
- How are we encouraging representation of thought through the arts?

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To Our Families and
Family Involvement Program:

All of the teachers and staff want to thank you for your generous gift over the holiday.

With Deep Appreciation for All You Do.
Thank You!

What else is in this issue?....

An article by Becky West, Sr. Child Development Specialist, Fall Projects Impact the Berkley Environment Read about your child’s classroom. (pg 2)
An article by Kathleen Cross, Sr. Child Development Teacher, Reflections from the teachers. (pg 3)

Up Coming Events

The Pancakes are coming! Berkley’s 12th annual Open House and Chris Cakes Pancake Breakfast held on Friday, February 12th from 7:00-10:00 A.M.

Save the Date

FIP and Berkley are planning a Family Dance Party to be held Saturday, April 2nd in UMKC’s Student Union from 4:00-6:00 P.M.
Watch for more details in the coming months.
During December's PDD we had the opportunity to visit Pembroke Hill Early Childhood program. They too follow a constructivist teaching approach and are inspired by the schools of Reggio Emilia. We left with some good ideas regarding the environment and the use of mirrors, family photos, documentation and displaying three dimensional work made by the children.

During March’s PDD we are having a full day seminar on The Environment as The Third Teacher presented by Alison Maher and Andrea Sisbarro of the Boulder Journey School, located in Boulder Colorado.

Alison is the Education Director at Boulder Journey School, where she has been employed since 1993. Alison has a BA in Psychology from the University of Virginia and a MA in Educational Psychology from the University of Colorado Denver. She coordinates and instructs a graduate program in Education in partnership with the University of Colorado Denver and the Colorado Department of Education and over the past decade, through this program has worked with more than 250 graduate students. Alison currently serves on the board of Hawkins Centers of Learning and, in the past, has been a board member at the Boulder County Association for the Education of Young Children and Friends School in Boulder, Colorado, as well as a committee member for the North American Reggio Emilia Alliance.

Andrea Sisbarro is one of the School Directors at Boulder Journey School, where she has been employed since 1995. Andrea works closely with classroom communities supporting curriculum development, family partnerships, organizational systems and learning environments. Andrea has a BA in Psychology from the University of Colorado Boulder and a MA in Early Childhood Education from the University of Colorado Denver.

We are looking forward to their visit with us. If you are interested in learning more about the Boulder Journey School click here
http://www.boulderjourneyschool.com/

And if you want to learn more about their work with Francis and David Hawkins click here
http://families.boulderjourneyschool.com/philosophy1.html

"Is it utopian to propose that teachers be permitted and expected to learn, too?"
- Frances Hawkins

Berkley Environment Impacts

Fall Projects

Witten by Becky West, Sr. Child Development Specialist.

In her groundbreaking book on the Project Approach, Lillian Katz reminds us that while academic goals address small units of knowledge and skills, the intellectual goals inherent to project work address dispositions—that is, habits of mind which include a variety of tendencies to interpret experience. The dispositions to make sense of experience, to predict and check predictions, to theorize, to find things out, and to strive for accuracy are developed in the complex learning experiences which make up a project.

This fall, the children of the Westport Room instigated a project from their intense interest in the cars they rode to Berkley in. Not content to simply ride, they explored under the hood of many cars and compared what they found there, documenting the process by adding a wall of photographs to their classroom environment which became a favorite classroom space.

The children in the Royal Room filled their classroom environment with cicadas and other insects early in the fall, and then, with the insects disappearing from the outside environment, began to ask questions about mail and post offices. By covering doors and walls all over Berkley with wonderful samples of written communication (mail!), our environment has been enriched with documentation from the Royal Room’s mail project.

The Plaza Room’s project visit to a classmate’s new home-under-construction inspired documentation on the walls which sparked the curiosity of the Zoo Room teachers and children as they began a project of their own on the subjects of house and home. Next, the documentation from the Zoo Room project took a design turn as they added blueprints and photographs of construction stages to their walls and began to consider what is inside a house. (Continued on next page)
Projects inspire many types of environmental change in the classrooms at Berkley. In the Plaza room, an interest in pets led to the adoption of a new mouse, who needed a house. Then, inspired by the construction of Berkley’s new playground, a mouse playground was designed by the children and added to the classroom environment for the mouse’s enjoyment.

Projects grow from the interests of the learner. In the infant and toddler classrooms, the earliest environment-influencing projects often grow from the family photos hold a prominent place in the I/T classrooms. Photos of family cover the walls; and as the collection of much loved faces grows, the children begin to extend their interest beyond “mine” family to the families of their friends and teachers.

From eye-catching photographs to a child’s first careful sketch of his favorite pet, the project approach inspires changes in the classroom environment. It becomes even more an environment inspired by the child’s interest in the world and guided by the disposition to make sense of experiences and interactions played out in what children choose to display of their work. That environment then becomes the fascinating third teacher in the classroom.

Popsicle the mouse playing on his new playground created by the Plaza Room:

Royal Room delivering the mail with the mail truck they created for their Berkley mail system.

“How do other programs support the environment as the third teacher?” Reflections From Touring Two Other Early Childhood Programs

Written by Kathleen Cross, Sr. Child Development Teacher and member of Berkley’s Documentation Committee.

This article is a reflection piece of my observations from touring both Top Flight Early Childhood Center and Pembroke Early Childhood Center. Like Berkley, both of these programs follow the theory of constructivist teaching and are inspired by the schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy. We had the opportunity to tour these programs during one of our Professional Development Days. We toured the programs with this question in mind “how do these programs support the environment as the third teacher?” As a member of Berkley’s documentation committee, I took it upon myself to “document” our teacher reflections.

The children in my classroom (Roo Room) are showing interest in letters and their sounds. For example, they have asked to write letters and lists for people, they recognize one another’s names on their water bottles, they watch what we’re writing, and they often ask us to sing “The ABCs.” Toddlers often show interest first in their own initials. A focus my co-teacher Kali and I have had for our environment is how to incorporate letters and print naturally and beautifully to encourage the children to continue exploring them.

This was something we looked for as we toured Top Flight and Pembroke. We have translated some ideas from those programs into ideas that work for our environment and for our particular children. We also found further inspiration from other Berkley teachers. Probably the most interesting reflection we have from our tours is different ways children’s work can be displayed for aesthetically pleasing documentation, the use of mirrors in the writing area and block area and some really creative ways to have the children spell the names of their classrooms and/or explore letters by using their bodies to make individual letters. We are thinking about ways our two year olds in the Roo Room would process this, and many preschool teachers thought they might try it for fun. (Continued on next page)
On reflection of our tours, we realized how we were doubly inspired by Berkley’s own Royal Room. Their mail project has been a huge hit with the Roo children, and once or twice a week, our children have gathered to “write letters” to loved ones and siblings and even to one another’s siblings. Additionally, we noticed that two of our children often linger by the Royal Room’s children’s sign-in sheet, where children can trace their names. We added a station with our children’s names and dry-erase markers outside our classrooms to both encourage the exploration of letters and encourage the children to want to get to Roo in the mornings.

Reflections from other teachers include, thinking about “less as more,” meaning taking a more intentional approach to learning areas and specifically the writing area. For example, one classroom pared down from eight dry erase boards to four and condensed their writing materials in the writing area. They found after doing this the children stay longer in the writing area than before the changes were made, they see new children going there, and the children are much more respectful of the materials. Also, many of the teachers are planning on re-organizing their art areas/materials to make them even more accessible to the children. They also want to introduce more glass or see-through containers.

Roo Room - Writing Letters For The Mail System at Berkley

Exploring Boxes in the Trolley Room

Painting in the Fountain Room

The Westport Room Creates Pet Carriers

Exploring Bubble Wrap in the River Room

Zoo Room Creating Blue Prints For Their Home Project