Hello Parents,

I am often asked about how we “teach” reading and writing at BioKids. I call our approach “Organic Literacy”. During any given day at BioKids children are encouraged to explore language through talking, music, reading, writing, listening, and playing. Humans are driven to communicate and children are like sponges, soaking in all the ways in which communication can occur. Children who are exposed frequently to books and print will naturally become interested in that form of communication. Their curiosity and subsequent development results in a drive to learn letters and make sense of print. Writing and reading go hand-in-hand; once the children understand that print carries a message, they are eager to express themselves with paper and pencil. The development of small and fine motor skills is important! Every day children are given many opportunities to develop their fine motor skills: drawing with markers or crayons, cutting with scissors, pouring sand and water in the texture table or sandbox, building with blocks and using the car / people / animal accessories in the block area, puzzles. Scribbles lead to lines lead to letters and numbers. Play dough is a great medium for developing and using the muscles in fingers!

Spelling follows later; it begins as what is called “inventive spelling” (Oun day thae had a fite – one day they had a fight) and as a child learns to read and recognize words and sounds, their spelling (generally) improves.

There are three incredibly basic, but reliable, indicators of a child's readiness to read:

1. print awareness – do they know that letters convey words that represent something (object, concept, names, etc.)

2. book awareness – do they hold the book right side up, look at it from front to back, know how to turn pages (English, front is different than some other languages).

3. letter awareness – do they know the names of the letters, not the sounds, just the names

I feel confident that every child in our Preschool Room has a firm grasp of these indicators by the time they go to kindergarten; most BioKids have mastered all three indicators by the time they approach the beginning of their Pre-K year and many have figured out #1 and #2 by their third birthday.

An example of what I mean by Organic Literacy is to look at how we approach the alphabet. Singing the Alphabet Song is cute, but it really doesn’t mean much. How old were you when you finally figured out that “L-M-N-O-P” were all separate letters? The most important letter in the alphabet is the first letter of your child's name. That's where learning the alphabet starts. The next most important letters are the other letters in their name. So, a Samantha is going to have an affinity for more letters right off the bat than a Joe. Recently a parent told me her two year old daughter was very excited about the letter O, even though it is not in her name. That is a perfect example of an organic jumping off point – talking about O, looking for it on signs, labels, boxes, etc. Letters presented in a familiar, easy to read format are also natural starting points. STOP signs are usually a favorite and natural jumping off point, as are CHEERIOS. Helping your child to appreciate that they do recognize labels can be lots of fun – cut out favorite labels and put them on a poster or bulletin board. Create a word wall in you home with labels and, perhaps for a Pre-K child, include what are called sight words like “the” as in Winnie the Pooh. Easy to decipher (plain font) labels of your child's favorite foods promote confidence that they can read, although packaging recognition is clearly not the real deal – it is a starting point.

Examples of organic literacy are on the BioKids Preschool Room calendar frequently; one is shown on the right. Though a bit over two years old, this child understands that print carries significance (numbers) and he did a fine job writing several.

If you have any questions about Organic Literacy at BioKids, please feel free to ask us about how we integrate reading and writing into your child’s day!

Robin
One Book One University

On April 11, both classrooms participated in the inauguration of the Center for Child Care and Family Resource's Family Literacy Event, One Book One University. http://childcare.utah.edu

Teach Appreciation Week

National Teacher Appreciation Week is the week before Mother’s Day, May 2-6! The following activities are being planned for teachers in both classrooms:

Monday – Thank you cards from home.

Tuesday – Flower Day! Bring a few posies and watch the bouquets grow.

Wednesday – Gift Bags! Please feel free to donate chocolate bars, crisp $10 bills, small soaps or lotions, movie tickets, whatever you think might be fun to find in a small package.

Thursday – Staff luncheon somewhere on campus.

Friday – Lunch brought in – always a nice way to wind-down the week.

If you would like to participate by donating small items for the gift bags, bringing in bagels or another treat early in the week, or providing some of the Friday luncheon, just let Robin know.

Parent-Teacher Conferences

One of our goals is to promote social and emotional development, so that young children in our program can be successful in school and later life. As part of this philosophy, we will be using an assessment tool focusing on social/emotional development screener called the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA). You will be asked to fill out a questionnaire and your child’s teacher will fill out the same questionnaire. You may recognize the tool from last year. The DECA looks at traits considered to be “protective factors”: self-control, initiative and attachment, which are related to promoting resilience in young children. The parent component will be distributed to you in late April or early May. Conferences will be scheduled for the last two weeks in May.

Sunscreen

As summer approaches remember that we sunscreen the Preschool children as they wake up from nap. If you have a particular sunscreen product you would like us to apply to your child, please bring it into the classroom, otherwise they will use whatever the grocery shopper purchases for the class to share. Please be sure to bring your child(ren) to BioKids in the morning with a new coat of goo. It takes us about 45 minutes to get everyone covered, so not having to do this twice a day is a huge time-saver. Also, don’t forget sun hats and lightweight long sleeved shirts.

In the Infant/Toddler Room we ask that parents provide whatever product you would like us to put on your child. Sunscreen is applied twice a day to children in this room.
Your house comes to the Preschool Room!

Manon has a great idea! We are going to put photos of students’ homes on our cardboard blocks. The children will absolutely love having their house in the block area! We are asking you to provide a photo, emailed to Robin or brought into the classroom, of the outside of your home. Feel free to bring in other photos as well of a room or two in your house – kitchen, den/play area, back yard, or your child's bedroom. Really, anything goes as we create our BioKids version of Google maps street view.

NAEYC Accreditation Visit

Manon, Sarah and Robin have poured through our accreditation files (2 packed file cabinet drawers) and are on the verge of being ready for our once-every-5-years NAEYC Accreditation visit! At this point we don’t know just when our site visit will be, but it will definitely occur prior to July 31st. At some point we will be receiving a three-week window in which the visit will occur, followed by a day-before phone call. We will be doing lots of house-keeping and tidying-up between now and the big day; parents will have the chance to come in and help with all sorts of miscellany – keep an eye on your emails for announcements.

Preschool Family Photo Book – Earn a Co-op Hour

We hope that each BioKids family with a child in the Preschool Room has made, or will make, a notebook sized collage or simple display of family photos for our Family Album. For those of you who do not have a page, or have one that is quite dated, the makings for a page are on the bulletin board in the classroom — cardstock and a page protector. You can fill one or both sides of the page. Your child will most likely want to participate in making their page for our Family Book. The pictures do not need to be professionally taken, or even on photo paper.

The children love looking through this book at their own family photos as well as those of other children. The pages will also provide a child who is having a difficult day a way to keep their family close at hand. Additionally, the pictures provide an opportunity for language-rich engagement and vocabulary building: various activities, relatives, customs and holidays. We would really like each child to have a page in the Family Book.

After creating or updating your page, be sure to give yourself an hour of co-op credit! Thanks!

Great Utah Shake Out

Once again, both classrooms will be participating in the Great Utah Shake Out, on April 21. Even though a campus-wide evacuation is not part of the program this year, the BioKids will trek up to the Marriott Library Plaza. The Infant/Toddler teachers will load up the evacuation crib and put it to the test. The Preschool Room will walk up to the Plaza.