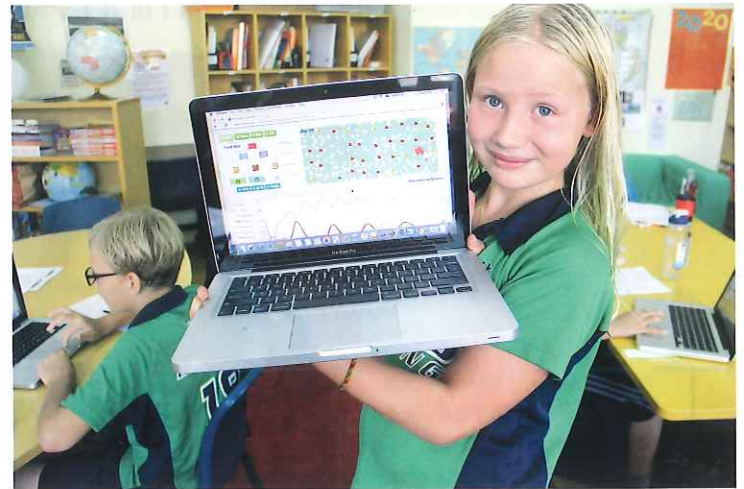


## Inquiry as a Frame of Mind

It's not only our own species that has had to suffer or enjoy the answer to the question, "What will happen if I do \_\_\_\_\_?" As I consider what it means to teach with an inquiry-based approach, I find myself recognizing that inquiry is a frame of mind rather than a new teaching practice. At the heart of such an education, which aims to take one's natural intrigue and curiosity and build connections, we find the most essential question of, "So, what?" being asked and answered.

I recently attended a professional development workshop with the world-renowned inquiry guru, Kath Murdoch, and came face to face with the mixed emotions that students of inquiry encounter. I felt both excited and terrified to be asking such open-ended questions and ultimately lead to more and more questions. During my most recent encounter with inquiry as a learner, I began to see the merit of this style of teaching, in large part because of its potential for authenticity. For example, when we need to fix a problem with our outdated software or figure out how to transfer music from one iTunes account to another, we are inquiring into a process to which we genuinely want to find an answer. The same can be true of cooking vegetarian lasagne or whether or not I should start taking vitamin D.

As adults, we are frequently inquiring into the ins and outs of our profession, families and general daily needs that we too often forget that children do this naturally. To consider inquiry as part of the educational system, we have to remember that our students are already questioning themselves



and their environment on a daily basis. As we embark on bringing the IB Primary Years Program (PYP) to Shanghai Community International School, Pudong Campus, we are at a moment in the school's history to truly integrate inquiry into our classrooms. The success of this depends on wrapping our minds around inquiry being a frame of mind, not just a process or method. There are many misconceptions that inquiry is too open-ended as to be unfocused and can, on the outside, seem less rigorous or serious than paper and pencil tests. When done well, good teaching, no matter what we call it, is based on the same foundation of making learning meaningful to students.

Inquiry takes it a step further and allows students ownership in the classroom. The teacher has got to make it personal and relevant so that in the end they care about whatever it is we are teaching.

Authentic inquiry as a frame of mind is a stance where the teacher acts more as a guide than a "know it all." For many, adapting their teaching to a PYP or inquiry-based approach will feel strange and, just as it does for me, disconcerting at times. This is because we are asking educators and parents to trust that, although the learning is guided by the teacher, ultimately it's the students who must build their own web of connections between what they already know and what they are learning. It takes a leap of faith to give up on the idea that only one answer fits all or that the limits of students' learning should only be what the teacher has expected of them.

The trick, it seems, is to encounter students' questions with an equally pondering mind so that I, myself, am just as drawn into the process of our collective learning. As we guide students to develop and find their own links between what they already know and the new learning that we want them to encounter, we can be impressively surprised. Also, by encouraging students to make the learning personal, the question of, "So, what?" is answered because the desire to know, discover, compare, examine, and analyze is compelled by one's own curiosity. As I try to wrap my head around inquiry for myself as a teacher, I am excited because I'm reminded that every day I will also learn something new because I am no longer limiting the contributions of my students' knowledge. We can enjoy the process of our learning together.

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