

HEAD OF SCHOOL MONTHLY

| September 30, 2016 | Derek Luebbe

THIS MONTH'S THEME: UNDERSTANDING INQUIRY-BASED LEARNING

Important Dates

September 30: United Nations International Day of Peace

October 1 - 9: National Holiday and October Break

October 10 - 14: China Go Trips

October 17 - 20: Book Fair

October 18:

9:00-10:00 LS Principal's Coffee
10:00-10:45 PAFA Meeting
10:45-11:45 US Principal's Coffee
12:00-15:30 Parent/Teacher Conferences

October 19:

12:00-15:30 Parent/Teacher Conferences

October 20:

George Mason University Korea campus visit

October 28: Halloween Festivities

Important Contacts

Derek Luebbe – Head of School

Liz Gale – LS Principal

Frank Volpe – US Principal

Naomi Shanks – US Vice Principal

Joanna Zhou – HoS Secretary

Trish Castillo – PAFA Rep

Important Links

[Weekly Menu](#)

[School Calendar](#)

[Communitas](#)

[Event Calendars](#)

[US Activity Calendars](#)

Welcome

Dear Parents, Students and Faculty



UNIDOP Song of Peace

Today is one of those days where you realize how truly fortunate you are to be an SCIS Dragon.

As we celebrate the United Nations Day of Peace (UNIDOP), we celebrate our SCIS community.

Watching parent and students – Nursery through Grade 12 – from 40 countries, we recognize that our community is an irreplaceable and important part of the SCIS experience. A thank you to all of you who prepared food, helped out, and were able to attend to make it so special. A special thank you to the organizers on the day, our PAFA and Ms. Moss, Ms. Caban, Ms. Mc Cabe, Ms. Kelly, Ms. Gale and Ms. Myers.

Our last month has been a busy one. On Wednesday, our boys and girls Volleyball teams were victorious in our “Senior Big Game Night.” The teams were cheered by approximately 60 spectators, spirit provided by Mr. Demas and the US Band, games and prizes between games, PAFA-boosters sold hot dogs and snacks, and the game was preceded by an Upper School



Honoring Our Seniors



Coffee With LS Principal, Ms. Gale

pep rally. Also on Wednesday, we held our first Coffee With The Principals where parents learned more about our new MYP/PYP programs. We plan to run monthly Coffee Meetings to ensure that we continue to communicate about our programs so that you can help support learning at home. Our next scheduled Coffee Meeting will be October 18.

The upcoming month will also be busy. Our Upper School students come back from the break and set out on China Trips. Progress Reports will be accessed online from ManageBac on October 14. **(Ensure you can login to ManageBac so you can access your child's report!** Read more on this later.) We have a PYP consultant visiting our campus on Oct. 13 and 14. And, the planning is already underway for our Halloween Celebration on October 28.

The main focus for this edition of the Monthly is to explore the important concept of inquiry-based learning which is a key feature in the IB PYP/MYP/DP program. We hope you find it enlightening and exciting.

Warm regards,



Head of School

Making the Move Towards Inquiry-Based Learning

Some decisions are hard; others are not.

I have many fond personal and professional memories of my previous six years with SCIS (2002-2008). In August of 2015, as I contemplated returning to SCIS after eight years in Budapest, I was most excited by the professional opportunity to lead the Pudong Campus in the development of the International Baccalaureate's (IB) Primary Years Program (PYP: Nursery-Gr. 5) and Middle Years Program (MYP: Gr. 6-10) to join our existing IB Diploma Program in grades 11 and 12. As an international educator for 21 years, The IB represents the most challenging educational program in the world. The IB Programs foster a holistic approach to educating children.

Knowing the IB and knowing the culture of SCIS, the connection was a natural fit. The decision to join SCIS was an easy one.

As I'm sure many of you know, SCIS has a few defining attributes. Some schools believe in rigid systems and ask students to fit within those systems; SCIS prides itself on developing a system that can be flexible to meet the needs of each child. Similarly, the IB takes a whole-child approach with its philosophy. Instead of rote tests, each child strives to make personal connections to construct their knowledge using inquiry. Unlike traditional units which focus on one topic, this new approach requires that teachers shape their units around meaningful questions which are worth uncovering. This is not the same traditional curriculum which I (and likely you) experienced. It requires a shift – in how we teach, how we view learning, and how we report student learning (grade). As a system of schools, it will be our number one focus for the year. It will be our job as a school to share what makes the IB so unique. As parents, you have some 'homework' as well; seek to understand what makes the IB philosophy so unique.

Research links students' success to the partnership between families and the school. The belief in a true *community* is something SCIS has valued ever since it opened its doors in 1996. As a community, we will need to work together to ensure that we share a common understanding of what learning means. The IB will help define that understanding. If parents and educators share a common understanding for student outcomes, it's the students who ultimately win.

That's a big reason why we are excited to build your understanding of the IB Programs throughout the year. Our monthly *Communitas* represents one way we can achieve this. This month, we'll take a look at the concept of **inquiry** within the IB Program. Each subsequent month, we'll take a look at a new unique aspect of the IB Program. As the year progresses, we hope you'll be able to see these elements come alive in your child's classroom.

What is inquiry? How is it different?

To borrow the words of Kath Murdoch, “to suggest that learning is *not* about inquiry is, in many ways, nonsense. The act of inquiry is critical to our learning and growth.” (Murdoch, 11) Yet, often in schools, there is a tendency to push a learner’s natural curiosity to the background. In short, many current teaching practices “present information (rules, laws, principles) together with examples, then ask students to replicate what they have been told.” (13) Inquiry-based learning is based in inductive practices – wherein the learner is challenged to gather and analyze information, review it against existing knowledge, seek connections, notice patterns and gradually build an understanding of a concept.” (13) It is grounded in a belief called constructivist-learning, where students need to build (or construct) their own knowledge by connecting it to previous knowledge instead of disconnected memorization and recall of information.

The IB itself makes this link clearly by stating that students “become enduringly skillful when learning is authentic and in context. The curriculum should emphasize the active construction of meaning so that students’ learning will be purposeful.” (*Making the PYP Happen*, IBO)

Allowing the space for students to question sounds great, but I wonder if they are learning any content. How does that work? And, how do teachers actually ‘teach’ with an inquiry mindset?

At SCIS, each subject’s curriculum is tied to national standards (example: the USA’s Common Core). One of the great misconceptions of inquiry-based learning is that students may not learn facts and meet standards because they are asking and exploring questions. Inquiry is a philosophy and it is led by the teacher. In effective inquiry-based classrooms, you will still see drills, lectures, and didactic learning. But those methods are not the default. They are means to an end - developing students’ skills in order to give them the tools to effectively navigate the exploration. Quality learning is always linked to standards. Inquiry classrooms believe that students will have a deeper understanding and longer retention of the standards when they build it themselves. Teachers strive to keep students focused on a relevant exploration.

So, how might my child’s learning look different?

A typical unit is usually focused on a single topic (examples: *The French Revolution* or *Persuasive Writing*) with a goal of “What do I want students to know?” An IB Unit of Inquiry starts with the goal of “What do I want students to **understand** and **be able to do**?”

Initially, you can see that it is rooted in action, applying their learning to be transferred elsewhere. The term understanding is an important and complex term. What does it mean to understand? It is more than summarizing or recalling information about a topic. Understanding comes in layers as we make connections. We peel these layers back like an onion depending on the depth of our understanding.

With this we come to see the difference – and the power – in inquiry. IB units of study do look different than traditional units because they are focused on over-arching essential questions of inquiry – questions that are concept-driven (not topic-driven), are worth pursuing and whose understandings can be applied in other situations. An example, shared by SCIS Pudong US Principal Dr. Frank Volpe, will clarify the difference.

Traditional Unit	Problem-Based, Traditional Unit Question	MYP Unit Inquiry Question
Migration Trends	Why do rural residents of Anhui choose to migrate to Shanghai?	Why do populations choose to migrate and how does this migration change the destination and the origin?

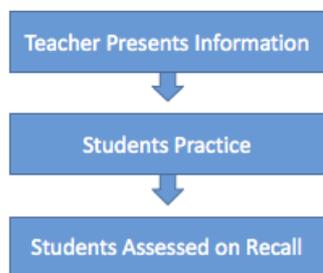
Exploring the MYP inquiry question allows connections. It is easy to see that the example of Chinese migration can still be studied, but the goal is to apply those understandings to the broader world.

Two aspects of inquiry are worth noting.

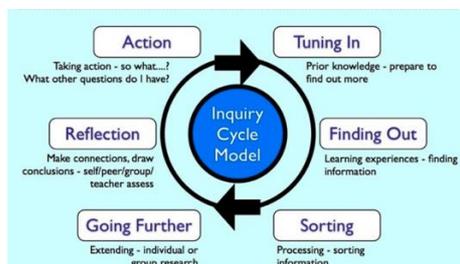
- Strong inquiry questions are concept driven, not topical. They can be used at a variety of age ranges and involve multiple disciplines (geography, economics, science, civics). Using our onion analogy, these

questions provide the opportunity to allow different learners to peel back the “next” layer at the level of understanding, challenging each learner.

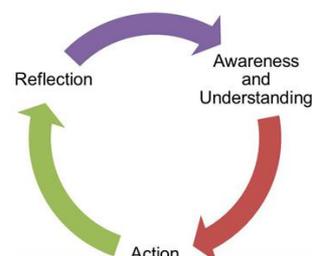
- Inquiry learning requires more work than traditional learning. It is not linear. It is somewhat messy as learners inquire and continually shift their understanding. This type of learning more accurately reflects how we all learn in the real world; it is shown below.



Traditional Unit Flow



PYP Inquiry Cycle



MYP Inquiry Cycle

By reviewing the models, we can infer that classroom practices within inquiry classrooms also differ compared to traditional classrooms. Practices are never an “all or nothing” choice, but it is fair to say that inquiry classrooms will have...

The IB can be (more than) a little confusing. It brings its own “educational vocabulary” that is needed to help understand the program. We’ve unpacked one concept - inquiry. It’s complex, but stick with it. And, just as we expect students to be inquirers, we ask the same of you throughout the year. Inquiry reflects a change in mindset. For example, instead of asking your child, “*what did you learn today?*”, ask “*what questions are you trying to answer in your current unit?*” or “*What questions did you ask in class today?*” These types of questions show that questions are the key to understanding. After all, we’re just peeling back the first layer of the onion.

... more	... less
Student explorations of a concept: discussion, problem-solving, debate, research projects	Lecture
Creating and making connections and patterns	Worksheets
Reflection as central part of learning	Recall of discrete, unconnected topics
Assessments of understanding, where concepts are applied to new situations	Assessments of knowledge

Additional Information

Login to ManageBac (and upcoming videos)

In order to view your child’s upcoming Progress Report (Oct. 14), all parents need to be able to login to ManageBac. If you have not yet logged in, you can learn how by visiting <https://pd.scis-his.net/content/technology-support> Parents have also asked for short video tutorials to learn how to navigate ManageBac – a great idea! We’ve added these videos. Check them out at the link above, and let us know if there are more specific videos you’d like to see.

How can parents stay current with school events and information?

Current school information is posted regularly at <http://pd.scis-his.net> . On this link you can also view and subscribe to different calendars. Once subscribed, calendar events can be updated and viewed on the devices of your choice and synced with your personal calendars. To learn more, visit <https://pd.scis-his.net/> and click on the “Main” calendar icon on the right hand side of the page.

Online Student Photos

As a reminder, each student’s individual photo is available online for purchase. More information can be found in the Principal’s Weekly Bulletin or by visiting [here](#).