

BEPS Essential Agreement – Inquiry

At BEPS we see inquiring as more than just a way of learning; we recognise it as being a way of living, of reaching out to the world, of forming relationships, making meaning and creating change. We believe that inquiring is what that we do from birth, as we seek relationships with the world around us. The desire to know is intrinsic and children in particular have an enormous capacity for asking questions and observing. We are born with minds that inquire and minds that connect, so it is important that our inquiries are interdisciplinary, authentic and purposeful. Further to this, we believe that education should be transformational, creating change within the learner and subsequently opening up the possibility for greater change in the world around them. Inquiring is the most natural, exciting and meaningful way of learning.

At the heart of inquiring is a deep sense of curiosity, wonder and awe from which arise lots of substantial questions. It is this sense of curiosity, wonder and awe, and these questions, that propel us forward and motivate us to learn. We recognise the importance of adults also feeling this sense of wonder and awe, of asking questions. In this way, teachers, children and families are all learners, all inquirers, and all researchers, inspiring each other and constructing knowledge together.

We believe that children learn through an active construction, making meaning by building connections between current understandings and new information and experiences. Inquiry allows each child's understanding of the world to develop in a manner and at a rate that is unique to them. In this transformational, inquiry-based approach, education is empowering, meaningful and lasting. We create this educational experience through the following:

Planning for inquiry.

We plan for inquiry-based learning in *all* areas of the curriculum, including literacy and maths **because inquiry is our pedagogy, not a subject** (added in response to SIT meeting – necessary?). Likewise, we integrate all curriculum areas in our 'big inquiries' wherever it can be done in a natural and meaningful way. These 'big inquiries' drive our programs and consist of key understandings and questions about a concept. Teachers decide upon the concepts, understandings and questions for the 'big inquiries' based on observations of children's interests, abilities and needs. Throughout our inquiries, which can last anywhere from months to years, we frequently use thinking routines and philosophy as a way of enriching our inquiries and making children's thinking deeper, more critical and lateral.

We plan for an emergent curriculum that is responsive to children's interests and abilities as well as social and cultural expectations that foster curiosity, passion and creativity. Our planning is rigorous and places on high expectations on children to think and learning deeply. Planning and assessment occur in a constant cycle to improve student learning. We expect that all student outcomes should rise in all areas of the curriculum as a result of a strong inquiry approach.

We plan in collaboration with our colleagues via the following processes:

- We use the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) strands (disciplinary, trans disciplinary and physical, personal and social) as well as the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF), children's interests and developmental readiness to plan engaging and rich experiences that promote curiosity.
- Through the analysis of documentation such as videos, conversations, photos and children's work, we discover children's interests, questions, knowledge, skills and understandings, all of which we use for our planning.
- By utilising the multiple perspectives of our colleagues, we identify possibilities for inquiry, design big ideas and questions to take learning further.
- We offer multiple possibilities to children rather than fixed routes or closed circuits, so that learning is an enticing invitation.
- We revisit documentation and children's work weekly, both with colleagues and with the children, to reflect on progress and learning, which then allows for new possibilities to relaunch learning.

Know the children.

We recognise that every single child constructs their own knowledge alone and with others. So that our assessment practices match our emergent curriculum, we take the time to really listen to and observe each child. We find out what children know, what they can do and what their prior experiences are as well as track and monitor their achievements and learning. We do this through rigorous assessment and collection of a rich range of documentation (see BEPS High Expectations document). Based on this knowledge, we offer each child many possibilities to explore and express their understandings in a myriad of ways. In this way we structure purposeful inquiries. Throughout each child's learning journey, we know when to step back and listen/observe, and when to step in and scaffold, giving feedback that identifies what is known and takes children into their zone of proximal development and on to new learning. We celebrate each child's learning journey privately, such as in one-on-one conferencing, and publically, for example displaying documentation or celebrating achievement to a group and communicating with families.

Know the curriculum.

The BEPS High Expectations document identifies the breadth of curriculum available to us when planning for inquiry. The transdisciplinary nature of the VELS is constructed in a way that lends itself to inquiry-based learning. The VEYLDF is a comprehensive resource for understanding children holistic development. We see the children at the centre of learning, and thus we plan according to the child and our documentation, using our broad understanding of the curriculum to support us to take children from what they know and can do independently through the zones of proximal development and onto new learning.

Know how to teach

Inquiry is the main pedagogy at BEPS. We employ an inquiry approach to teaching in all areas of the curriculum, recognising that children learn very successfully through acquisition, interacting with and observing their environment. We also know that in order to take children further in their learning, to challenge their thinking, to ensure that they develop the skills and understandings expected in our society (such as meeting curriculum standards), we need to scaffold their learning. This is best done by personalising each child's learning in a differentiated curriculum, ensuring a balance between acquisition learning and explicit teaching.

We undertake professional development such as doing action research, discussing empirical studies, reading developmental theories, engaging in professional dialogue and observing peers in order to understand the theories, beliefs, practices and approaches to education that both inspire us and form the backbone of our pedagogy at BEPS. These include Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), Social Constructivism, Reggio Emilia's approach to education, Philosophy for Children, Play-Based learning and learning by acquisition. The research being conducted by Project Zero at Harvard University, such as Making Thinking Visible (which includes Thinking Routines), also provides us with inspiration and guidance. (I just added this in...)

Environment as the third teacher.

We create environments that are beautiful, inspiring, open, rich and inviting. In these environments we make the learning visible and demonstrate what is valued by displaying documentation and presenting children's work with pride. In this way we promote a culture of excellence and reflection. We draw inspiration from Reggio Emilia's municipal approach to pre-school education.

The result is that educators and children are constantly striving to form new knowledge and cross new boundaries. In this way, the research and learning are continuous with transformations occurring constantly. We expect that through our inquiries, we, the children and educators, are able to have an impact on our community and wider world, involving and sharing with others. Finally, children's learning outcomes reflect their curiosity and creativity so that their true potential may be reached.

Reference:

All staff at BEPS are expected to be familiar with the following:

- BEPS High Expectations
- VELS <http://vels.vcaa.vic.edu.au/>
- VEYLDF <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/earlylearning/eyldf/default.htm> (also saved in the Inquiry folder on the staff server)
- Philosophy For Children <http://p4c.com/> and <http://www.p4chawaii.org/resources/getting-started>
- Project Zero <http://www.pz.harvard.edu/> (links to Making Thinking Visible and Thinking Routines)
- The Northern Metropolitan Region's Powerful Learning and Curiosity http://www.nmr.vic.edu.au/nmr_stratgey_book_for_web/#page/2/mode/2up
- The DEECD's e5 Instructional Model <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/proflearning/e5/>

The following documents and folders are useful references and readings to help you develop your pedagogy and practice in line with the expectations and beliefs at BEPS:

- The Inquiry folder in the staffroom (an orange binder) is full of professional readings, especially about Reggio Emilia, Vygotsky's ZPD and social constructivism
- The Inquiry folder on the staff shared server also has lots of professional readings (mostly the same ones).