Bringing Inquiry and Reggio Emilia Inspired Approaches to the Junior Grades

Pedagogical Values and Practical Strategies

Stories from Grade 4, 5 & 6
The Bishop Strachan School
Stand aside for a while and leave room for learning, observe carefully what children do, and then, if you have understood well, perhaps teaching will be different from before.

Loris Malaguzzi
Our intentions and hopes for our time together

To give an overview of values that inform our Reggio-inspired & inquiry-based pedagogies

To offer stories and strategies

To have an experience that helps us put it all together: connect our values with our practice

We also hope to highlight the rich potential we find in a pedagogical approach focused on possibility, on the beauty and wonder that children bring, and the provisional and unpredictable nature of learning
These seeds are the name writers. The seed writes the name of the flower.

Camryn, 5 years old
Image of the Child
All children have preparedness, potential, curiosity; they have interest in relationship, in constructing their own learning, and in negotiating with everything the environment brings to them. Children should be considered as active citizens with rights, as contributing members, with their families, of their local community.

Lella Gandini
As competent and thereby subject to rights

Can ask meaningful questions, make connections

Have a capacity for complex thinking and take on challenging tasks

Empathy

Sensitivity to beauty

Unique identity and point of view

Co-construct knowledge & ideas
Teacher Research

Big Idea Meeting, Sept. 2017

Looking at student work, Inquiry Meeting, Sept. 27, 2017

considering possibilities...

plant defense systems
burrs

burrs and velcro

biomimicry

plants, ecology

system

ecosystem
animal protection

ravine

insects

snails and habitat

systems

crystals

seed structure
OUTDOOR NATURE CONNECTION

Our walks together in the ravine are an intentional way to build community by spending time together in a new context. In this special place close to BSS we have a chance to look, listen, wander and wonder together. When we return to our classrooms we bring with us discoveries and questions, artifacts, and nature mysteries to observe closely and research further.
“Look at that web. It looks like a tornado.” Tracy
“It’s like a nest.” Phyllis
“Webs are beautiful when they have water drops all over them.” Tracy
“It looks like the fur of an animal.” Rose
“I think it is just many little seeds. You could use a microscope to see them all stuck together.” Olivia

“Is this garlic mustard? I might be able to tell by the smell.” Libby
“Well, we know it’s all black and it’s very hard.” Alex
“I want to take it back to school to study it more. I want to know what it is.” Olivia

discoveries...
Using the classroom as a laboratory for further research
Why does a burr have hooks?

I think they are seeds. And if you plant them they might turn into a bir.
Research into adaptations...
Pedagogy of Listening
A Pedagogy of Listening

Listening is not easy. It requires a deep awareness and a suspension of our judgements and prejudices. It requires openness to change. It demands that we value the unknown, and overcome the feelings of emptiness and precariousness that we experience when our certainties are questioned.

Listening takes place within a “listening context,” where one learns to listen and narrate, and each individual feels legitimized to represent and offer interpretations of her or his theories through action, emotion, expression and representation, using symbols and images (the “hundred languages”).

- Carla Rinaldi
The emergence of meaning through shared inquiry

The role of the teacher as researcher, observer, guide, provocateur, who learns alongside

Upholding democratic learning environment, inviting all voices

Making thinking visible

Listening to the many ways children can express thought, emotion and energy

Suspending judgement and welcoming uncertainty
THINKING TOGETHER

Engaging in the process of Knowledge Building

Students gather and share theories, questions, identifying gaps, explore information.

All involved in making sense of where the group is at, and where the inquiry might go.

In collective search of the rise above.
Recording a Conversation

Looking at two sides of a controversy

Izzy - Was the boy (in the red hat) good or bad?

Sarah V - It depends on whose side you’re on. If you like Trump you are with the one side.

Marina - I think that it depends what the boy is doing. He has a smirk on his face. I assume he’s making fun of the Indigenous side. They’re both fighting for different sides, so they are fighting for what they think is right, but they’re two different things.

Njala - Maybe it's just grey. Maybe there isn't just good or bad. Sometimes you think someone is doing the right thing, but maybe it's just a thing... it's grey... (trails off)

Catherine - I would add on Njala’s. I think that it’s grey, they just have two completely sides of the story and have two completely different sides of how the government should be run.

Zoe - I think the biggest thing is that the younger people are not showing respect. If it’s about them having different beliefs, it doesn’t matter if you don’t agree, you still have to be respectful.
Empowering Student Voice & Action

Listening for opportunities to grow and move from idea to action
Girls Should Never Be Afraid To Be Smart!
100 Languages
100 LANGUAGES

The atelier has brought many materials and techniques, but also has illuminated a need, not only for children, but for human beings to communicate in a way that rationality and imagination travel together. We believe in a multiplicity of languages that are integrated and not separated. We believe that this makes learning and understanding more rich and more complete.

Vea Vecchi
100 Languages

Environment, materials, expression

Shifting focus from dominant languages and challenging false dichotomies

Exploring ideas inherent in materials, representing and revealing thinking

Translating ideas across languages or disciplines, opening to new learning

Inviting complexity and beauty

Upholding value of imagination, heart and poetics

Opening all of our senses

Making visible the invisible
Possibility Arrives

Lit by a spark of natural curiosity, we work to create contexts to support viewing the world from multiple perspectives and through multiple lenses.
Can bugs change the world?
Why do some bugs look like human objects?
Why are there so many different types of bugs?
Why are there so many different species of bugs?
Why do bugs up close look like a galaxy?
What are all the body parts of a bug? Do bugs have the same body parts as us?

D’Arcy, 9 years
Initial written and graphic observations and interpretations

Beautiful bugs
Butterfly
dragonfly

Rainbow colors

Clownfish

Long legs

Scales

Sharp teeth

Sly

Nice
e.

Bugs are more interesting than people.
Moving deeper into relationship: Representation as Research
Observation & Imagination in Dialogue
Is there something that helps us see what bugs see? It’s going to be hard because we can only see from the outside. We can’t see what (they) see from the inside. No one knows but the bugs.

Julia, 9 years
But if bugs were trying to investigate the ways humans see, they would probably think our vision is weirder.

Julia, 9 years
Becoming the bug
Strategies
Creating structure and space to support learning and meaning-making.

‘How’ Strategies
Digging into the inquiry process

Provoke + Listen + Gather

Imagine + Explore + Amplify

Identifying key concepts to illuminate directions to head toward

Analyze + Rise Above

Engage in a process of research through play, exploration and representation, inviting multiple languages and lenses in relationship with ideas.
Provoke + Listen + Gather

- Make thinking visible: *Chalk Talk*, *See Think Wonder*, *Mind map*
- Gather Initial Theories
- Observe closely and draw
- Knowledge Building Circles
- Generate questions
- Etymology of Big Ideas
- Perspective taking
- Imagine and Play
- Search for evidence and examples
- Use language that supports questioning, theory development, dialogue, revision
- Document: photograph and note conversations throughout process

Analyze + Rise Above

- Highlight innovation and divergent thinking
- Identify key quotes from students
- Interpret documented conversations and experiences
- Select key photographs
- Sort theories according to trends, patterns, connections
- Identify categories of thinking, possible directions
- Make connections among ideas, to other concepts, to other disciplines
- List and explore possible next steps, resources, experiences

Imagine + Explore + Amplify

- Head in a variety of directions
- Disrupt assumptions or conventional thinking
- Build on divergent thinking
- Introduce new languages, lenses and materials in dialogue with concept of interest
- Invite representation: graphic, three dimensional, dramatic, etc.
- Revisit, reiterate, revise
- Continue documenting the process in multiple forms

'How' Strategies
Digging into the inquiry process
Creating structure and space to support learning and meaning-making
Identifying key concepts to illuminate directions to head toward
5B Sept 26th after a ravine trip:
Chantal and Bryony present the plant they found in the ravine that looks like burrs but also seems to have flowers on it.

Alex: I think it is like a porcupine and that's how the plant protects itself.
Brooke M: It's like the top of a question mark, the part that catches onto your clothes.
Chani: I got this idea from Ms. Sawyers that it is sticky because it has seeds in it. It grips onto an animal and when it shakes the seeds fall.
Libby: I also think there are seeds in there but the hooks are to protect the seed.
Sarah: It's the outside part, like a snake shedding skin, or an exoskeleton.
Maddie: Yes I agree, it's like a snail when it is ready it will come out like a cage or shelter.
Cindy: I think if an animal is hurting it, it will stick on, so the animal won't hurt it anymore. When it rains that thing will come off, but the animal will already have an idea that it is dangerous and will leave it alone.
Chantal: I'm noticing that there is a hook at the end.
Libby: It's like velcro, like what got stuck on Sarah's sock.
Jazaba: There is the hook, but where on the other end where they are attached is a really big circle. I wonder if that is where the seeds live. Maybe when the hook comes off the seeds come out.
Tracy: Maybe the animals try to eat the seed so this stops them. Maybe they (these plants) are cousins to the ones we found on the playground (the seed pods from Beech trees).
Maddie: It is like a flower.
Cindy: I think how they get these things is when they get water on them, like a rainstorm, it makes the sticky part come out.
Bernice: When you look at the difference (between the flower part and the burr) the alive one has seeds and the dead one doesn't.
Roxanne: Libby said it was like velcro and I saw on the news that the guy who invented velcro was walking his dog and the burrs got stuck on his dog and that's how he got the idea for the invention.
Engage in a process of research through play, exploration and representation, inviting multiple languages and lenses in relationship with ideas.