Ice, water and us!

Central ideas and the concepts of finite resources and sustainability, such as the water cycle, are often present in early years curriculum. As kindergarten teachers, we have run into examples of central ideas being explored in a variety of PYP schools at the early years:

Water travels on a journey and is used, re-used and changes along the way.

Water is essential for life and is a limited resource.

Water is a limited resource that is essential to life.

Water is an essential resource for life.

We also noticed that different lines of inquiry could lead into various relevant and pertinent lines of inquiry:

- Sources and forms of water
- Human use of water
- Availability of all forms of water
- Impact of humans on availability of water

Children initiate inquiries. Support and enhance their spontaneous explorations by involving yourself with them through a process of sustained shared thinking*, you will enable co-construction of new meaning as a group. Engage with them when necessary and then disengage to let them collaborate with each other to reach new understandings.

Snapshots on practice are scripts of scenarios shared by educators, hence their rather informal tone.

Similar kinds of articles (personalized) can be found on the blog called Sharing PYP practice [http://blogs.ibo.org/sharingpyp/].

If you have ideas for new Snapshots on practice (early years), please send a message to pyc-curriculum@ibo.org.
SNAPSHOT ON PRACTICE

In this example

A group of 5 year-olds were enjoying a week of playing in the snow when they found ice and brought it into the classroom to show each other. Following up on children's interest and to encourage the children to continue exploring, we (teachers) set out water to freeze overnight in a variety of containers, which the children found outdoors the next day. The large containers only had a thin layer of frozen water, and some children wanted more ice.

Our relationships with children propelling learning

In the conversation that followed the ice discovery event, the idea of making more ice took central stage. Some children decided that taking the ice to the oven would make it grow because, in their experience, items placed in ovens often grow. Others disagreed, saying they needed to put more water outside. We then helped the children follow up with both ideas. We would not have planned this experience without listening to the children. The idea for the learning experience would also not have emerged if we had documented each child's response in isolation. Instead, the inquiry arose from the shared conversation amongst adults and children and led the children to many learning experiences. They discovered that they are able to compare their ideas; that their ideas are valuable; and that ice melts and disappears in heat. This learning experience includes many of the essential PYP elements*: knowledge, concepts (change), transdisciplinary skills* (research, observation and communication), attitude (curiosity), and actions (demonstrating respect for the children's ideas and grounding them in concrete experience).

Extending the shared thinking to the home environment

In another scenario involving the study of water, children ran out of theories on why water evaporates. I (teacher) was ready with an explanation and the heat source to demonstrate the experiment, but as the theory did not come out of the children's discussions that day, I decided to wait and extend the line of inquiry (forms of water) to the home environment. By asking children to tell back home about the various experiences they conducted around water and inquire about the experiences that happen around the house with water, a week later a child came back with pictures of him cooking with his parents explaining that boiling water for pasta made the water transform into vapor. This re-opened the discussion into the various sources of heat that can lead to water evaporation, which were then explored in the classroom and outside on the playground.

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