

Learning at JIS – from Cath Wan, Deputy Principal/ PYP Coordinator

Learning through outdoor play - even when it's cold!

It was wonderful to welcome some classes into school this week. In the mornings, the students have been rushing in, dumping their bags as quickly as possible and engaging immediately with their classmates in what I can only describe as extremely energetic, enthusiastic, delightful play. While teachers braced for the cold, the students seemed completely unaffected by it as they raced around on scooters and tricycles, went on bug hunts under the trees, got together in teams for ball games, built obstacle courses, balanced on beams, made mud pies in the outdoor kitchen and much, much more.



On my way to join Mr. W on the playground on Thursday morning, I was greeted by what sounded like a party in an amusement park: roller coaster sounds, accompanied by loud excited squeals. It turned out that a group of students were experimenting with attaching playground trolleys to tricycles with ropes.

The adults on the playground, apart from ensuring safety, did not intervene. As I observed, a list of 'curriculum items' which were being developed started to form. Here are a few things that I observed.



Approaches to Learning

Thinking skills

Critical: evaluation and making decisions

Creative: generating novel ideas; considering perspectives

Transfer: application in multiple contexts

Students came up with different ways to tow the trolley. They experimented with different combinations - 2 tricycles towing 1 trolley, 1 tricycle towing 2 trolleys and so forth. They offered and listened to different viewpoints. They applied scientific understandings related to movement and force.

Communication skills

Exchanging information: listening, interpreting, speaking

The play was a constant stream of offering ideas, playing with ideas and expressing their delight!

Social Skills

Interpersonal: respecting others supporting others, resolving conflict

The students did not always agree, but they managed this with respect and problem solving strategies.

Self-management skills

Organisation: goal setting

Stands of mind: perseverance, resilience, self-motivation

There was a common goal which they had created amongst themselves. There were many setbacks: knots had to be re-tied, tangles untangled and things needed to be repositioned.

Language Development

Speaking and listening: verbalising their thinking and explaining their reasoning - especially when they were trying to convince others that their way was the best!

Science

Strand: Forces and energy

Skills: identify a problem to be explored; carry out an investigation

Learner Profile

Inquirers: nurturing curiosity and learning with enthusiasm

Thinkers: solving problems, initiative, creative and critical thinking

Risk-takers: Trying something new -even when they found riding the trolley a little scary!

Core values

Commitment: keeping going over numerous attempts

Kindness and respect: in their interactions - even when disagreeing!

In addition there was something that isn't explicitly mentioned in our curriculum, but is inferred throughout: **joy.**

If we go back to our August survey where we asked you to tell us what you value most, well-being, being active, happiness, social interaction, remembering that school is fun were among the top responses. In our current times, making sure we emphasise these things are crucial!

Dr. Stuart Brown (2009) describes play as:

- Apparently purposeless (done for its own sake)
- Voluntary
- Inherent attraction (it's fun!)
- Freedom from time (where did the time go?)
- Diminished consciousness of self (we stop worrying if we look good or whether we might make a fool of ourselves.)
- Improvisational potential
- Continuation desire (these children did NOT want to stop!)

Angela Hanscom (2016), author of *Balanced and Barefoot* describes some of the benefits of outdoor play as “offering risk and challenge” - helping children build confidence, learn to be adaptable and challenge themselves at their own pace. She also emphasises how taking physical risks improves body and safety awareness.

Throughout our cold months, it is tempting to huddle in doors around our heaters. But a gift that we can all give our children that will develop their academic learning alongside giving them joyful experiences is uninterrupted, outdoor play.

On another note, as I was re-reading a few articles on play in preparation for this newsletter, I was reminded (by Dr. Stuart Brown) on the importance of play for adults. He suggests that we *all* have something that we can lose ourselves in, that has no purpose and that brings us joy. With our busy adult lives, I know that it's easy to forget about looking after ourselves. So whether it is hiking, snuggling up with a good book, getting out a good board game - whatever makes you lose track of time because it's so much fun, I hope you get some time for it this weekend!

The references below are all books that we have in our parent resource library. Feel free to contact AL or I if you would like to borrow them.

- Brown, S. (2009). *Play: How it Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul*. Penguin Group
Cohen, LJ. (2001). *Playful Parenting*. Ballantine Books
Elkind, D. (2007). *The Power of Play*. Da Capo Lifelong Books
Hanscom, AJ. (2016). *Balanced and Barefoot*. New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

As always, feel free to contact me with any questions on learning at JIS at *****