

Book review

Fahey, J. (2012). *Ways to learn through inquiry: Guiding children to deeper understanding*. Cardiff, UK: IB Publishing.

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Jo Fahey's recently released book, *Ways to learn through inquiry: Guiding children to deeper understanding* (2012), fills a niche in the early-childhood field for understanding and utilizing inquiry. This book asks "what does inquiry-based learning look like with young children?" (Fahey, 2012, p. 1) and in so doing engages a wide audience in the exploration. Practicing teachers and school administrators, university students, and scholars can investigate and contribute from their respective positions in gaining understanding to this question. The text demonstrates in a clear and authentic manner applications of inquiry in the International Baccalaureate (IB) Primary Years Programme (PYP), especially for teachers of children 5–8 years of age. This review will share the author's background and expertise, summarize the book's key meanings, features and overview, and offer conclusions that include positioning the book in the field and recommendations.

AUTHOR BACKGROUND

With over 30 years of early-childhood experience in a variety of roles (practitioner, researcher, trainer), Jo Fahey, PhD, has a long and rich background in the early-childhood education arena. Educated as an early-childhood teacher in her home country of Australia, her first years were spent as a kindergarten teacher before moving to Germany, where she taught as a primary-years teacher in an international school (1989–1995); in that venue she also conducted classroom action research and became fluent in German. She was one of the curricular writers for the initial International Schools Curriculum Project during this time and later when it evolved into the PYP. She has been an IB workshop leader since 1998, taught in IB schools internationally and serves as an IB visitor. Her curiosity and interest in the PYP resulted in a dissertation topic examining inquiry in 5–8 year olds, with two PYP schools serving as the research sites. This book is an outgrowth of that in-depth qualitative research. Dr Fahey continues to teach in a PYP school and mentors university students interested in early-childhood education. Given her extensive experience and education as a teacher, researcher, curriculum writer and professional development leader, Dr Fahey possesses the necessary

expertise to write this book and as a credible scholar makes a worthy contribution to the field (<http://blogs.ibo.org/ibstore/our-authors/author-jo-fahey/>).

INTRODUCTION AND FEATURES OF THE BOOK

Ways to learn through inquiry provides an introduction that is instrumental to its success. Prior to delving into the intricate topic of inquiry, Fahey clarifies inquiry as a dynamic, organic process that is a philosophical stance and way of teaching; as such, inquiry is intertwined with international mindedness as it reflects global themes of interdependence, sustainability and peace. Fahey delineates common terms that can have multiple connotations so that the international readership is entering the book in sync on early-childhood teacher nomenclature and informal and formal learning environments. She devises a special features system of "boxes" to detail both inquiry and the PYP; these are used in chapters two through eight and are ideal ways to anchor important recurring tools for understanding within the text. These chapter boxes highlight units of inquiry (central idea, transdisciplinary theme, key concepts, related concepts), strategy (sharing, inquiring, assessing, variations) and tips (handy hints, suggestions). Additionally, the author provides a rich and valuable

glossary, which she references frequently for integral terms including those affiliated with the PYP. One formatting suggestion for the introduction would be to put the asterisk denotation in this “features of the book” section as a visual feature in addition to a description. We found all of the features very helpful for the multiple entry points to understanding inquiry and the PYP.

OVERVIEW

Chapter 1, “Inquiry, Assessment and the Primary Years Programme (PYP)”, anchors the book yet could be used as an independent work to understanding how inquiry evolved—naturally and as a way of being in schools—and how those understandings have broadened over time. Prudently, how assessment of learning occurs in an inquiry-based curriculum is articulated, and this is interwoven in the following chapters with sharing and assessment strategies. The last few pages of this chapter illuminate how inquiry is structured in the PYP; this explicit connection of the PYP’s cohesive framework as it interfaces with inquiry serves as an introduction, review and reference for the reader.

riculum are in evidence, allowing inquiry to show in the various content areas. Fahey repeatedly shows an awareness of all modalities for all children to learn, regularly including curricular variations and differentiation that are so important for a commitment to all children, be they in private or public settings. All chapters prod the reader into wondering about how inquiry might look in one’s own classroom. Among many of the book’s attributes, the one that may be the most valuable to teachers is the many photographs portraying genuine classroom experiences. A high level of authenticity is conveyed through photos of children’s environments, work samples, transcribed conversations, artifacts, assessment pieces and children thoroughly engaged with materials, peers and teachers.

It was a pleasure to see the incorporation of technology, particularly in chapter 3’s “Inquiry through Browsing and Viewing”. This distinctive chapter title reminds the reader to the underpinnings of authentic investigations: observation and the continuum from natural learning strategies to incorporation into formal schooling. Chapter 6 is “Inquiring through Drama” and moves beyond performance drama to spotlight process and educational drama with many useful

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Chapters 2–8 are written in a complementary fashion, similar in structure, tenor and tone. Each chapter examines *inquiring* through various teaching and learning methods: read alouds and responses; browsing and viewing; organizing ideas; play; drama; research; and the arts, respectively. Fahey’s book is an ambitious undertaking and her chapter topics are refreshingly powerful for remembering the high level of learning and engagement that happens in a dynamic, organic and reflective environment. In so doing, respect for the whole child is foregrounded and honoured seamlessly throughout the book. It is appreciated that one of the most in-depth chapters, chapter 5, is devoted to inquiring through play—socio-dramatic play specifically—and shows the multiple educational, social and emotional benefits, and the elements of empowerment and well-being that occur in play. Similar to chapter 1, this chapter incorporates theory and an abundance of practical wisdom (e.g., inquiry boxes, display boards) and could easily be used as a work in itself.

Congruent to the PYP framework, the concepts that drive the cur-

examples of addressing classroom issues through collaborative problem solving. Authentic questions are posed and tension is positioned positively as resourcefulness, perseverance, respect and collaboration are welcomed in considering queries. “Inquiring through the Arts”, Chapter 8, is invigorating as it states the value of music, clay, woodwork, drawing, painting and a combination of dance, music and storytelling through symbols as not only expressive but also disposed to inquiry.

“Inquiring through Research” (chapter 7) shows the PYP intentionality in answering “How do children, in their early years of schooling, develop the research skills that will become the keystone of much of their later learning?” (p. 161). Thus, we see the importance of the PYP contributing to the IB foundational tenets. Fahey illustrates how children in the PYP research through people (adults, children and experts), collecting data and the world around them, and see the value of learning and taking action on that research. Her experience with the PYP is particularly helpful as she shows the ebb and flow

of guided inquiry and empowering children as inquirers/researchers. This chapter is also valuable when thinking of research collaboration between early-years and older-years PYP students who may participate in “buddy” systems while co-investigating research topics; when closely inspected, it stimulates seeing the value of collaborative partnerships more productively.

The epilogue provides a reflection on how the broadening understanding of inquiry enables young children to better understand themselves and the world. It is a brief statement and given the inquiry journey processes and depth, we desired more reflection on the whole process. Perhaps similar to chapter 1 on inquiry, a final chapter on reflection would have provided a deeper delving and a bit more guidance for global connections. For example, as the PYP expands to a number of public schools what might be some approaches and/or insights regarding possible time constraints (e.g. shorter days, shorter school years and mixed resources) to support inquiry? It would be advantageous for someone with Fahey’s expertise to weigh in on how teachers and administrators might troubleshoot challenges to specific realities that are presented in many schools.

CONCLUSIONS

This book is recommended for teachers, leaders and administrators in all PYP schools. It is recommended as a primer and foundational text for those schools considering an inquiry-based learning focus; this includes local, national and international schools. Additionally, this book is a valuable resource for preservice early-childhood teachers as they learn the value of inquiry in the early-childhood years and in the PYP specifically. In-service teachers doing postgraduate work could also use it as an entry into the inquiry stance of PYP. In these contexts, the book can be a resource in many ways: early understandings and historical knowledge of inquiry; an inquiry primer; an inquiry paradigm; and an inquiry reference/resource guide. Granted, if the reader is not IB-trained, specific IB terms may be confusing, but there remains significant, applicable learning regarding inquiry and introduction to key terms in the PYP. To that point, the author notes further information is available on the IB website (<http://www.ibo.org>), in PYP publications (at the online curriculum centre) and in the IB store. This book is written with invitations for learning at many different levels and could be read at different times in one’s IB journey.

This resource has earned a place for inquiry in the early years along with the Reggio Emilia approach (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 2011; Project Zero & Reggio Children, 2001) and constructivism

and the project approach (Chaille, 2007; Helm & Katz, 2011). Additionally, it is supported by more recent early-childhood curricular work of Hyun (2006) and the negotiated curriculum along with File, Mueller and Wisneski (2012) and their call for re-examination of how to support preservice and in-service teachers to take on the more complex and involved conceptions of curriculum.

This book is valuable for teachers of 5–8 year olds, informative for teachers of 3–8 year olds, and begs for a companion piece for teachers of older children in the PYP. The PYP, the IB and inquiry embody a rich complexity; Fahey makes these understandable in a succinct yet thorough text and serves as the more capable peer (Vygotsky, 1978) on our inquiry in the PYP journey.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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*Guiding Children to
Deeper Understanding*

JO FAHEY

