

# Personal inquiries in the PYP

*Supporting PYP educators*

## Introduction to personal inquiries in the PYP

### Why

In a remote learning environment, personal inquiries can provide an opportunity for middle to upper primary students to focus on their own interests and be motivated to drive their own learning. Personal inquiries seek to actively ignite passion, inspire relevance and develop agency in students.

They also enable the integration of home and family languages, languages of the school, as well as additional languages. Personal inquiries engage students in a deep, authentic learning experience that builds academic skills, fosters reflection, and can inspire action.

### What

#### Transdisciplinary learning

Personal inquiries allow for the continuous integration and connection of prior and new knowledge and experiences in a meaningful way to broaden students' understanding about the world around them. They go across, between and beyond subjects, and emphasize integrated learning. The acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills, in their broadest sense, is essential as these skills provide students with the tools to inquire more effectively. It is helpful for teachers and families to support students making connections and exploring the relationship between the subject areas.

#### Independent, yet collaborative

A personal inquiry usually requires a student to work independently, however, the process can still be collaborative to support student success. Students can be connected to others in meaningful ways that support their inquiries. Students might be partnered with a peer



or family member that they can check in with daily or regularly in order to share challenges, successes, ideas, set goals and help create accountability.

A teacher can deepen the inquiry experience for the students in a variety of ways: asking questions; listening to their thinking; redirecting when necessary; giving feedback. Teachers can have regularly established check-ins with students to help ensure a successful learning journey.



### Role of the student:

Students can be responsible for:

- planning and organizing learning
- driving the inquiry process through their questions
- documenting learning
- learning reflections
- self and peer assessments
- action.

Students take responsibility for planning their inquiries and conferring with their teachers if they need to refine or change their ideas. They can reflect on their own learning and give feedback to others, offering improvements. Finally, students can initiate collaborative actions that reflect local, national and/or global significance.

### Role of the teacher:

Teachers support the development of knowledge, skills, conceptual understandings, learner profile attributes and considerations for action by nurturing these authentic learning experiences.

To support agency, teachers might use multiple strategies, tools and resources when conferring to:

- spark interest
- create tension through provocation
- set up collaborations
- provoke investigations and reflections
- give specific and ongoing feedback on skills and understanding
- co-construct goals and next steps
- create agreements around timelines and self-assessment
- redirect learning as appropriate.

### Role of the family:

Family members are encouraged to contribute their expertise and feedback where possible. They can support their child to:

- explore ideas
- listen and question for clarification and deeper understanding
- prioritize goals
- establish timelines
- browse and suggest suitable resources
- designate check-in times to see how learning is progressing and discuss next steps
- share their inquiries with extended families or friends
- celebrate learning and daily achievements.

For families with multiple children, a family inquiry, rather than multiple personal inquiries could be planned and carried out. Members involved with this inquiry could collaboratively agree upon an area of interest.

### How

There are many approaches to designing, planning, conducting and sharing personal inquiries. These will vary depending on factors such as age, learning needs, logistics, context.

The personal inquiry planners are designed to guide the inquiry process. Please feel free to adjust them as needed. They are aligned with the core elements of the PYP and can be flexibly used by students.

The planners are available to download in PDF and Word formats from our dedicated resource page: <https://www.ibo.org/programmes/primary-years-programme/resources-for-teachers/supporting-pyp-learning-during-the-covid-19-coronavirus-pandemic/>

## Suggested approaches

### **TIMING:**

Depending on schedules, a personal inquiry can run for 3-6 weeks or more. When possible, it is helpful for students to have adequate time to:



Design©Copyright Showeet.com

### Learning how to learn:

While the students may be deeply engaged in the content, instruction might be required around skills and processes needed for effective inquiries. These could include:

- asking questions (e.g. open vs closed, factual, conceptual, debatable)
- sourcing information
- critically analysing sources for reliability and accuracy
- notetaking
- organizing data or research notes
- interviewing
- taking photos
- writing emails and thank you letters.

### Engaging students initially:

There are many approaches to helping students choose a personal inquiry. Suggestions to focus their passions and interests could include:

- creating a mind map or list of possible options and questions
- sharing passions/hobbies/interests/questions with others

- interviewing family members and other relevant experts
- exploring local and global issues around a transdisciplinary theme or concept through images or videos
- sharing what a central idea means to them and what interests/questions they have around it
- establishing a list of criteria.



Design © Copyright Showet.com

### Documenting learning and reflections through journals:

Personal inquiry journals can be a wonderful way to document the learning process.

Different sections of the planner can be expanded upon in a journal. It can be a place for students to document their investigations, interviews, surveys, new understandings, further questions and findings.

Journals can be created using various digital and non-digital tools including:

- different digital programmes to add images, audio, links etc to create presentations in different forms
- mixed art mediums (e.g. folder, poster, portfolio).

Inquiry journals can:

- facilitate feedback between both teacher and student and student to student (this can be online or face to face)
- support analysis and evaluation of information collected
- create reflection space for personal learning goals and achievements.

Reflective prompts throughout the process can support students in considering their learning more deeply and in determining next steps. Some reflective prompts to use might be:

- What did you learn today?
- What don't you understand yet?
- What new questions do you have now?
- Have your ideas or thinking changed? Why?
- What different opinions/views are there on this subject? What's your opinion and why?
- Can you explain your learning in different ways?
- How does your learning connect to the local/global world?
- What do you want to learn more about?
- What can you already do?
- What will you work on next?
- What can you do to become a more effective learner?
- What factors are important for helping you learn well?
- Have you considered ethical, cultural and environmental implications?
- What new learning would you want to share with or teach your peers?

### Investigating:

A variety of resources can be used throughout the investigation stage. Students may need additional support to expand their ideas around potential resource options. Some questions for students to consider might include:

- What specific knowledge and skills might be needed that I do not already have?
- What type of materials and resources will contribute to my inquiry?
- Where can I source these materials?
- Who might I learn from? How can I contact them?

There are many resources students can access beyond digital tools for researching. Other resources and tools that may also contribute to the depth of an inquiry include:

- design materials
- game pieces or other manipulatives,
- arts, science or kitchen supplies
- community members
- local and global experts.

### Sharing and celebrating the learning:

Students need to consider how their inquiries will be shared, for what purpose and to whom. Considerations might include:

- Who is my audience?
- How might I engage my audience?
- What is the purpose of sharing my learning?
- What is the most important information to share?
- How will I share my information?
- How might I make my presentation come alive?

There are many possibilities to make the learning process visible. Students are encouraged to think creatively and consider a variety of tools to best help them express themselves.

Some ideas for sharing personal inquiries include:

- journals or E-Books created by students, with the opportunity to articulate and present their learning processes and progress
- learning products (e.g. songs, poems, dramatic performances, visual art forms, business plans, oral history videos, reports, curations, mixed media presentations, documenting experiences and actions, debates, web pages, videos, technical drawings, flow charts, experiments, etc).

***If permitted by your school and to get an international audience, please share personal inquiries on your social media platforms using the hashtag #pipyp. You could also notify us through @ibpyp. We would love to hear about what you are doing.***

#### Action:

Personal inquiries provide the local and potentially global contexts that can encourage students to take responsible action in a meaningful, mindful and responsive way. Students planning and carrying out personal inquiries may need support in initiating action. Different circumstances such as available resources, different forms of collaboration and interactions might need to be considered.

Action can be personal or collective. Here are some examples:

- a change in attitude
- a consideration or plan for action in the future
- a demonstration of responsibility, or of respect for self, others and the environment
- a commitment to supporting a local community group or volunteering
- an engagement in family, community, or local decision making

Teachers can support student action by:

- engaging students in dialogue around what action is
- encouraging students to consider the appropriateness and impact of their actions
- guiding students to reflect on their actions and adjust their course of action when necessary.

#### Assessment:

As part of PYP assessment practices, students take an active role in their assessment. They learn to self-assess and discuss their progress towards achieving learning goals.

Tools such as the ones below could be used by students to reflect on their learning and action on an ongoing basis. When conferring with students and analysing their work these can be used to help students set learning goals and determine next steps. They are designed to be modified according to context, age and learning needs.

## Reflection statements connecting to Action and the Learner profile

<b>Statement</b> 	I know myself well and see myself as belonging to local and global communities.	I am actively part of communities: my family, my home, my learning community and beyond.	I am developing and demonstrating attributes of the learner profile that support me in becoming internationally-minded.	I am confident in my ability to participate and contribute to positive change.
<b>Learner profile attributes</b>	Reflective	Caring	Balanced, open-minded	Reflective risk-taker
<b>Statement</b> 	I demonstrate motivation, willingness and commitment in taking action for positive change.	I can recognize and understand the interconnections and interdependence of opportunities and challenges of local, global significance and use critical and creative thinking to address them.	I can connect local action to global action and vice versa.	I can challenge assumptions and see things from multiple perspectives.
<b>Learner profile attributes</b>	Caring, principled	Knowledgeable thinker	Thinker	Open-minded thinker and risk-taker
<b>Statement</b> 	I am curious and reflective and act with integrity and honesty.	I make informed and ethical decisions.	I can confidently and creatively plan, carry out and reflect on action.	I engage in meaningful experiences with peers, teachers and the learning community that lead to action for positive change.
<b>Learner profile attributes</b>	Principled inquirer	Principled thinker	Communicator	Balanced
<b>Statement</b> 	I can reflect on action and modify courses of action when necessary.	I can consider the appropriateness and impact of action taken and reflect on possibilities to improve present and future action.	I take responsible action for a more peaceful and sustainable world.	I see myself as a competent and capable agent of change.
<b>Learner profile attributes</b>	Reflective	Reflective thinker	Reflective, balanced and caring	Reflective

Sources: The exhibition, IBO, PYP (2018)

## Reflection on Approaches to Learning

<b>Approaches to Learning</b>	<b>When I am working on my personal inquiry, I really enjoy...</b>	<b>When I am working on my personal inquiry, I notice that I find it easy to... when... (give example)</b>	<b>When I am working on my personal inquiry, I notice that I find it challenging to... when... (give example)</b>	<b>I can help myself with this challenge by...</b>
<p><b>My Thinking Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Critical thinking (analysing; evaluating; forming decisions)</li> <li>-Creative thinking (consider new perspective, design improvements to products, processes etc.)</li> <li>-Transfer learning (use skills and knowledge in multiple contexts; make connections between subjects and inquiries; transfer understanding to create solutions, actions or products)</li> <li>-Reflection (use thinking skills to reflect on the process of learning; identify your strengths and areas for improvement)</li> </ul>				
<p><b>My Research Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Planning my investigations</li> <li>-Gathering information and recording data (conducting surveys; interviewing; reading a range of resources; studying diagrams)</li> <li>-Understanding data</li> <li>-Use a range of media to compare, contrast and draw connections among resources; seek a range of perspectives from various sources</li> <li>-Determine reliable sources and using media ethically to communicate; share and connect with others</li> </ul>				

<p><b>My Communication Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Exchanging information (listening; interpreting; speaking)</li> <li>-Literacy (reading; writing; using language to communicate and gather information)</li> <li>-Communicating using technology to gather, investigate and share information</li> </ul>				
<p><b>My Self-Management Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Organization (managing time and tasks effectively; setting realistic and challenging goals; documenting learning using a logical system; completing tasks on time)</li> <li>-States of mind (using mindfulness strategies to overcome distractions; being aware of body-mind connections; persevering, managing emotions; being resilient to manage setbacks and work through disappointment; challenge and change)</li> </ul>				
<p><b>My Social Skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Relationships (respecting others; listening closely to other perspectives; practicing care and empathy for others; taking on a variety of group roles; making equitable decisions; helping others succeed)</li> <li>-Social-emotional intelligence (being aware of your own and other emotions; resolving conflict, being aware of your impact on a group)</li> </ul>				

Sources: Approaches to Learning, IBO, PYP (2018); Murdoch, M. (2015)

## Question prompts that could be used for reflection

<p><b>CHANGE:</b></p> <p>How is ... transforming?          What differences are there over time?          In what ways does ... differ from place to place and over time?          What can you say about how... is changing?          What could you change to make...?          What can you infer about the change in...?          What facts would you use to support how... is changing?</p>	<p><b>CONNECTION</b></p> <p>How is... linked to other things?          What connections exist between... and...?          How are... alike and different?          Why is ... suitable for...?          How would you apply what you learned to develop...?          How can this be used in everyday life?          What can you conclude about how... is related to...?</p>
<p><b>FORM</b></p> <p>What is...like?          How would you describe...?          What are the components of...?          What would you use to classify...?          Can you elaborate on the reason...is like it is?</p>	<p><b>FUNCTION</b></p> <p>How does...work?          What can... be used for?          What is the purpose of...?          What information does... give us?          How do... and... work together?          What do you notice about how... works?          Can you formulate a theory for how... works?</p>
<p><b>CAUSATION</b></p> <p>Why is... as it is?          What is the reason...?          What would happen if...?          Why do we need...?          How is... related to...?          Can you predict the outcome if...?          What can you conclude about why... occurred?</p>	<p><b>PERSPECTIVE</b></p> <p>What are the points of view?          How is... different than...?          How does... look if it's...?          What are the implications for...?          What is your interpretation of...? Support your rationale.          What facts would you use to support your perspective about...?          How does knowledge of... allow us to understand...?</p>
<p><b>RESPONSIBILITY</b></p> <p>What are our obligations?          How can the use of... influence...?          What responsibility does... have to...?          Who should decide...?          How can people ensure...?          What factors do we need to consider when making a decision?          What can you conclude about what your responsibility is?</p>	

Sources: *Making the PYP happen*, IBO, PYP (2009); Aungst (2014); Erickson, HL (2007)

## Sample central ideas based on the learner profile

Here you will find a variety of sample central ideas created around the learner profile attributes. They have been created in such a way that they may be used under multiple transdisciplinary themes with multiple key concepts. The sample lines of inquiry may lend themselves to certain transdisciplinary themes more so than others. These are samples. If you think your students would benefit from a more guided inquiry, you might use these on the personal inquiry template. Feel free to adapt them to your own context and needs.

**Inquirers:** We nurture our curiosity, developing skills for inquiry and research. We know how to learn independently and with others. We learn with enthusiasm and sustain our love of learning throughout life.

CI: Through inquiry, we nurture curiosity and develop research skills and the ability to work independently and with others.

CI: Our curiosity helps us learn.

### Sample possible transdisciplinary theme, key concepts and lines of inquiry

Theme: How the world works

Key Concepts: Responsibility, function, causation, change

Lines of Inquiry

- How humans respond to change
- Patterns found around us
- Evaluating, sorting and presenting data
- Using technology to innovate

**Knowledgeable:** We develop and use conceptual understanding, exploring knowledge across a range of disciplines. We engage with issues and ideas that have local and global significance.

CI: We become knowledgeable by exploring locally and globally significant concepts, ideas and issues across a broad range of subjects.

CI: We become knowledgeable by exploring big ideas in our local and global world.

### Sample possible transdisciplinary theme, key concepts and lines of inquiry

Theme: Sharing the planet

Key Concepts: Connection, Change, Responsibility, Causation

Lines of Inquiry

- Connections between local and global issues
- How living things respond to change
- Human impact on the environment
- Factors that influence choice

**Thinkers:** We use critical and creative thinking skills to analyse and take responsible action on complex problems. We exercise initiative in making reasoned, ethical decisions.

CI: Thinking critically and creatively and asking and exploring challenging questions helps us understand complex problems and make reasoned, ethical decisions.

CI: Asking questions and thinking creatively helps us understand problems and make decisions.

**Sample possible transdisciplinary theme, key concepts and lines of inquiry**

Theme: How we express ourselves

Key Concepts: Function, Responsibility, Perspective

Lines of Inquiry

- Critical evaluation of different types of information
- How we interpret and respond to media
- Why viewpoints differ

**Communicators:** We express ourselves confidently and creatively in more than one language and in many ways. We collaborate effectively, listening carefully to the perspectives of other individuals.

CI: We communicate in many ways to better understand each other.

**Sample possible transdisciplinary theme, key concepts and lines of inquiry**

Theme: How we express ourselves

Key Concepts: Function, Perspective, Responsibility

Lines of Inquiry

- Discoveries made through different types of play
- Communication in play
- Our responsibilities in play

CI: Play invites opportunities for communication and creative expression.

**Sample possible transdisciplinary theme, key concepts and lines of inquiry**

Theme: How we express ourselves

Key Concepts: Function, Causation, Perspective

Lines of Inquiry

- The diverse ways in which people communicate
- How images, text and music are used to influence behaviour
- The role of culture in artistic expression

**Principled:** We act with integrity and honesty, with a strong sense of fairness and justice, and with respect for the dignity and rights of people everywhere. We take responsibility for our actions and their consequences.

CI: Respecting the dignity and rights of people everywhere requires integrity, honesty and taking responsibility for our actions.

CI: Inclusive communities help create independence and equitable opportunities for all.

**Sample possible transdisciplinary theme, key concepts and lines of inquiry**

Theme: Who we are

Key Concepts: Causation, Perspective, Connection

Lines of Inquiry

- Interdependence within communities
- Factors that influence our choices and actions
- Similarities and differences between cultural groups

**Open-minded:** We critically appreciate our own cultures and personal histories, as well as the values and traditions of others. We seek and evaluate a range of points of view, and we are willing to grow from the experience.

CI: We understand each other better when we critically appreciate our own cultures and personal histories as well as the values and traditions of others.

CI: Understanding each other's cultures and traditions connects people to their families and communities.

**Sample possible transdisciplinary theme, key concepts and lines of inquiry**

Theme: Where we are in place and time

Key Concepts: Form, Perspective, Causation

Lines of Inquiry

- What constitutes culture
- How personal history informs our perspectives
- Why some values and traditions have changed or remained the same, over time

**Caring:** We show empathy, compassion and respect. We have a commitment to service, and we act to make a positive difference in the lives of others and in the world around us.

CI: We make a positive difference in the world around us when we commit to service with empathy, compassion and respect.

CI: Our caring actions make a positive difference in the lives of others and the world around us.

**Sample possible transdisciplinary theme, key concepts and lines of inquiry**

Theme: Sharing the planet

Key Concepts: Function, Causation, Responsibility

Lines of Inquiry

- How local environments address people's needs
- Equitable access to resources and opportunities
- Our responsibility for the well-being of others

**Risk-takers:** We approach uncertainty with forethought and determination; we work independently and cooperatively to explore new ideas and innovative strategies. We are resourceful and resilient in the face of challenges and change.

CI: We are resourceful and resilient in the face of challenges and change.

CI: Change brings opportunities to be resourceful.

**Sample possible transdisciplinary theme, key concepts and lines of inquiry**

Theme: How the world works

Key Concepts: Change, Causation, Connection

Lines of Inquiry

- How living things respond to change
- How circumstances lead to the creation of important inventions
- How understanding phenomena helps inventors

**Balanced:** We understand the importance of balancing different aspects of our lives—intellectual, physical, and emotional—to achieve well-being for ourselves and others. We recognize our interdependence with other people and with the world in which we live.

CI: Our well-being is multifaceted and interdependent with other people and with the world in which we live.

CI: We foster well-being, for ourselves and others, by making balanced choices.

**Sample possible transdisciplinary theme, key concepts and lines of inquiry**

Theme: Who we are

Key Concepts: Form, Causation, Responsibility

Lines of Inquiry

- What it means to have a balanced lifestyle
- How the choices we make affect our well-being
- Our responsibility for the well-being of others

**Reflective:** We thoughtfully consider the world and our own ideas and experience. We work to understand our strengths and weaknesses in order to support our learning and personal development.

CI: To support our learning and personal development, we thoughtfully consider the world, our own ideas and experiences, and to work towards understanding our strengths and weaknesses.

CI for early years: Reflecting on our ideas and experiences helps us grow.

**Sample possible transdisciplinary theme, key concepts and lines of inquiry**

Theme: Who we are

Key Concepts: Form, Connection, Causation

Lines of Inquiry

- Personal abilities and interests
- How relationships contribute to our understanding of self
- How people use different experiences to inform decision-making

Sources: *What is an IB education*, IBO, PYP (2017); *A transdisciplinary programme of inquiry*, IBO, PYP (2019); *Developing a transdisciplinary programme of inquiry*, IBO, PYP (2012)

## References

Erickson, HL. 2007. *Stirring the Head, Heart, and Soul Redefining Curriculum, Instruction, and Concept-Based Learning, third edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA, USA. Corwin Press, Inc.

IBO. 2012. *Developing a transdisciplinary programme of inquiry*. Cardiff, Wales. International Baccalaureate Organization.

IBO. 2009. *Making the PYP happen: A curriculum framework for international primary education*. Cardiff, Wales. International Baccalaureate Organization.

IBO. 2018. *PYP: From principles into practice*. Cardiff, Wales. International Baccalaureate Organization.

IBO. 2019. *What is an IB education?* Geneva, Switzerland. International Baccalaureate Organization.

Murdoch, K. 2015. *The Power of Inquiry*. Northcote, Vic, Australia. Seastar Education.

*Using Webb's Depth of Knowledge to Increase Rigor*. 4 September 2014. <http://www.edutopia.org>.