

Slide 1 - Beth

Hello from NIST International School in Bangkok, Thailand
I'm Beth Dressler, the Deputy Head of Elementary and PYP Coordinator; I'm joined with Nicky Bourgeois, Year 6 Homeroom teacher and Philip Williams, Librarian

Slide 2 - Beth:

To set the scene for our context, I'll tell you a bit about our school.

Our mission is: NIST inspires growth, empowers individual excellence, and enriches lives. We are guided by our values of caring, community, integrity, and growth.

NIST was the first full IB World School in Thailand; next year we are celebrating our 25th year. We are not for profit and we were established with the support of the United Nations. We are located in the heart of Sukhumvit, a main shopping and tourist area in Bangkok. We are a very diverse community with over 1500 students from 3 years to 18 years old and from more than 50 countries. Our teaching staff come from over 25 countries. We offer a diverse mother tongue and world languages programme, with 14 languages other than English taught at NIST.

Our Elementary School has 750 students from 3 year olds to 11 year olds, and is very inclusive, with a large Student Support Services Team, including Learning Support, English as an Additional Language, Enrichment Support, and a counselling team. We also have a team of 5 coaches, including 2 Digital Learning Coaches, a literacy coach, a math coach, and our librarian Philip.

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In thinking about the webinar topic, pedagogy require a design response, we have focused on the tenants of the PYP framework of constructivism, inquiry and conceptual understanding.

For the purpose of this webinar we have considered '**design response**' as broader than simply physical space, we have defined it as a concept meaning intentionality, challenging assumptions we might have, and how we explicitly link our actions to what we believe.

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In preparing for the webinar we have explored two questions that have been part of our design process:

How do our practices at NIST reflect our core beliefs about learning?

And

How do we enact the core value that 'we are all learners'?

Slide 5 - Nicky

These ideas are things we are still grappling with ourselves, our process is not complete and so we share them with you from our disposition as learners.

Slide 6 - Nicky

Today we would like to share two specific examples that address our two questions: the first one being the design and build of our Mechai Learning Commons (Elementary School library) and the rewriting of the NIST Elementary Language Curriculum, and professional learning that accompanies this.

For both of these examples a similar process was followed and is ongoing.

- A focus group of teachers developed clear philosophy statements that continue to act as the filter for all future decision making.
- Pedagogically-driven design and creation of the MLC space and the written Language Curriculum documents.
- Neither of these are considered complete. They exist in a constant cycle of iteration through practical usage, feedback, reflection and refinement and continual investigation to ensure the ongoing actions embody our beliefs. (Cycle slide)

While it may seem that these two examples are very different, it is by viewing them through the conceptual understanding that our beliefs drive our practice that holds them together.

Slide 7 - Nicky

Similarly to Ron Ritchhart's work on 8 Cultural Forces, we believe that regardless of whether or not we want them to, our beliefs about learning are being communicated through our practices, physical spaces and interactions. We continue to explore how we can best leverage these, through intentionality. What we don't do, and what we leave out are equally intentional.

In order to be intentional, we have to understand what we are trying to be intentional about... We want to ground ourselves in the why and have this drive our practice.

Slide 8 - Nicky

We place value on continually evolving and developing our constructivist pedagogy.

For us key elements of that pedagogy are:

knowing our learners, believing that children are capable and competent, listening and responding to students as individuals and inquiring into their thinking. How teachers position themselves is key to raising the status of the learner and forces us to think about who is doing all of the work, and who is doing the learning. Additionally, a conceptually written curriculum used responsively allows inquiry learning to flourish and students to build their own meaning.

Slide 9 - Nicky

Key educational thinkers we have been inspired by are Debbie Miller and Matt Glover, particularly their work on putting beliefs into action. When we think about these two it is their

alignment with our pedagogy that makes them a source of inspiration for us rather than a programme they provide.

Slide 10 - Philip

We are working to purposefully build a community of learners around our students. When we think of our community of learners we view that as inclusive of all students, staff and parents. We are all learners.

So, what does this specifically look like in our two examples?

Slide 11 - Philip

After 18 months of planning, the NIST Mechai Learning Commons was opened in August 2015. Physically it is a modern, flexible learning space that truly mirrors our philosophy statement. There are purposeful areas for large group, small group and individual learning and sharing....or to just get a coffee.

Slide 12 - Philip

The furnishings allow for ongoing reconfiguration in response to the culture and community that exist within that space. **We are always designing so it is as unfixed as possible.** It is a place of serendipity, where community flourishes spontaneously and **we see this as one of our success indicators.** These are the moments where it truly reflects its purpose.

Slide 13 - Philip

For example the other morning when two classes were learning in the space, a group of fathers from the German community were meeting over a cup of coffee, a new family was touring with administrators. We were able to immediately connect them into our broader community. This is our qualitative data.

Slide 14 - Philip

This is an example of the many moments that happen throughout each day that tell us that we have achieved our aim of building a community space, that serves as a space for ideas, reflection, collaboration and interaction. The Mechai Learning Commons is a welcoming and engaging central hub that connects our multilingual community.

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Over the course of 2 years we rewrote our elementary school language curriculum. A driving purpose of this was to place emphasis on the conceptual understanding of language, holding true to our belief that language learning is developmental and that students construct the meaning. We also believe that all teachers are teachers of language, and that the conceptual understandings of our written curriculum apply to mother tongue language learning as well.

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In August 2016 the NIST Language Document was completely rolled out and the focus shifted

from the written curriculum to the learning and teaching of language. The enculturation of this language document positions teachers as learners, parents as learners, and students as learners. We are all learners.

In line with our belief that professional learning should be an ongoing relationship that empowers our coaches, our teachers, our students and our parents, we reached outside of our immediate community to access literacy experts who could work alongside us.

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An example of how we enact our belief that we are all learners was evident through this process. Our experts worked in classrooms with our students, whilst NIST teachers learned in these masterclass sessions.

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The expert paused to teach the teachers right in front in of the students. Students witness their teachers as learners so they too understand that we are all learners.

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These lessons were videoed for ongoing learning. A parent workshop echoed the same messages given to teachers. A weekend workshop expanded on practical examples.

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Our choices about professional learning for our new written language document have been strategic and intentional in order to make explicit our beliefs about learning. We know learners need time to process their thinking. We know learners need to reflect and share their thinking and strategies, and to construct meaning around these. We believe this to be true for our entire community.

Slide 21 - Philip

In this we have taken from design thinking the elements of identifying a need, building a response, iteration and ongoing reflection.

Slide 22 - Nicky

Throughout this ongoing process, our walk away is to continually go back to the philosophy, and have this act as a filter for ongoing intentionality. This enculturates us as a school, which takes it away from being personnel dependent, which is a crucial factor with the transient nature of international school communities.

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We feel like this process is ongoing and in the webinar we aimed to share our process by investigating our two questions:

How do our practices at NIST reflect our core beliefs about learning?

And

How do we enact the core value that 'we are all learners'?

Thanks Steve for the opportunity to share - the process of filtering our ideas and thinking into a ten minute webinar has been very valuable - and has given us the chance to slow down, reflect, think, and give ourselves the space to think about where we have come and where we might go with our learning. We really appreciate the chance to be part of this. Thanks!