

“I wonder why do we do maths at school and not at home? And why is Maths about numbers? And who made maths? I also wonder why I can’t see the earth turning around? And why can’t I see or touch air? And why am I black?”



WHAT do children WONDER about?

AS A TEACHER I WAS TRAINED TO PROVIDE CHILDREN WITH correct and appropriate answers. And ironically it was not the children who were asking the questions in the first place. I was.

There seems to be an underlying belief that our role as teachers is to provide children with answers to the questions that we think should be important to them. And as a consequence, children have become very good at answering the wrong questions correctly. I wonder if there are any prizes at prize giving for the children who are asking the inquisitive questions?

And thank goodness for those few children who did ask questions and were not satisfied with the so-called ‘factual’ answers. If they hadn’t we would still be living on a world that was flat without any form of progress at all.

At our school we believe that it is not what we teach that is so important, but what is being learnt while we are teaching it. We felt we needed to ask ourselves an important question. So what are children actually learning, and more importantly, what questions are they asking about themselves and the world around them? Perhaps then we could find ways to support their real learning.

So we created wonder books where the children could brainstorm the questions that are most relevant to them.

ten, we began to see diverse perspectives of their world. The children took this exercise seriously.

Here they were given an opportunity to share their views of the world.

“I wonder why there’s a sun? And

And their wonderings about the world are also very practical:

“Why did fish develop not to breathe air? And why is the sea salty and whales bigger than sharks? How did people communicate before

English and is English made up of one language? Who made English and where do the words come from? How did people communicate before?”

It was Albert Einstein who said that “the significant problems we have cannot be solved at the same level of thinking that created them.”

“Why do we have gravity? Why do we need gravity? Why can’t we take gravity away?”

By engaging children in their questions and by taking them seriously, we can create a curriculum that emerges out of the children’s interests and is framed by the teachers. Learning becomes more than rote repetition. It becomes authentic and relevant. It energises and inspires. It is self motivated and participatory. It is exciting and fulfilling to everyone involved. And they still get to learn how to read, write and do maths at the same time.

You don’t have to ‘compromise’ on anything. But it is not enough to just ask children what they are wondering about. They have grown up in world that says that there is a right answer for everything. Children ask questions knowing that someone else will probably give them the ‘right’ answer. They no longer have to think critically. Anyway, if they do, their experience has been that they are most likely to be ‘wrong’.

Our current challenge is to encourage children to move beyond the ‘wondering’ to actually doing something about it. Can they consider and come up with possible hypotheses to explain their wonderings? And then can they go out and test them?

So what do you wonder about? Or have you, like most of us, lost the awareness of what questions inspire your thinking?

I’d like to share with you some of my wonderings: I wonder what would happen if we could transform education to empower children?

I wonder what our lives would be like to have a multitude of synergetic relationships with the people around us and with the world we live on?

I wonder what our true potential as a human species is?

And I’m committed to doing something about it! 🌍



At first, the questions were simple; they reflected the immediate world around the children:

“Why do dogs bark? Why do cats jump? Why can pencils write and why are the stars bright? Why are puppies cute and why do giraffes have long necks?”

For other children, their world is made up of other questions:

“Why am I different? And where does HIV/Aids come from? And why is HIV/ Aids killing people?”

And for others, more questions:

“Why do people get brain tumours and why did I get one? And why don’t all people get them?”

Within a group of children aged eight to

I wonder why people exist? In the Eastern Cape why do people eat beans and samp? Why is love, love? And why is love so silly? Why do we have to go to school? And why do we get an education? Why do people want to learn? How did the first people learn to write?”

Traditional schooling does not seriously take the subjective views of children into account. Traditional schooling has a pre-determined curriculum which does not necessarily consider what is currently relevant to children’s lives.

We have found that by inviting children to co-create a curriculum that is relevant and meaningful to them, the emergence of learning is exponential and deeply satisfying to them.