

Signature

The *Signature of a BSS Girl* includes seven attributes that are plotted on a matrix. It is vital for our students to be looking inward at themselves as well as outward, understanding and caring about their impact on others. Curiosity, self-awareness, grit, voice and leadership will be viewed through the lens of Growth Mindset when focused on the self, and Ethical Citizenship when focused on the self in relation to others.

BSS will build on each girl's strengths to develop her whole self through the *Culture of Powerful Learning* and a supportive environment. As she continues beyond BSS, she will come to an understanding of herself and others as complex beings, prepared for life's opportunities and challenges.

Innovation, leadership and volunteerism.

In 1867, the first class of forty-six young women came to The Bishop Strachan School to study under these principles. Much has changed in the lives of young women in Canada and around the world since the school opened. Yet our insistence on creating an intellectual community built on innovative programs, leadership training, and giving oneself to people and institutions beyond the school endures. We are intentional about clearly articulating our demanding and forward-thinking curricular and pedagogical principles, most recently in the *Culture of Powerful Learning*.

In this booklet, we introduce the *Signature of a BSS Girl* as part of the *Culture of Powerful Learning* to complement and inspire that programmatic vision. Today's girls and young women navigate a complex world with challenging expectations. The Signature is the product of intensive research on contemporary girls' psychology, wellness, character development and leadership models. It was created and refined in consultation over several years with focus groups of students, teachers, parents, alumnae, and with the help of consultants McKinsey and Company.

The *Signature of a BSS Girl* establishes a set of personal attributes that are encouraged, nurtured and taught at the school. We at BSS believe they will help our girls to truly live the school's vision to "be an inspirational force for women to reach their full potential as transformative leaders" in today's world.

The Signature exists in two forms. The student framework presents the attributes as series of questions to be considered. An expanded version for teachers and parents includes a glossary that defines the terms used and sets the parameters for the work of the attributes.

Signature of a BSS Girl

Student Framework

GROWTH MINDSET (SELF)

I am committed to hard work, persistence, and a desire to learn.
I have a growth mindset.

ETHICAL CITIZENSHIP (SELF IN RELATION TO OTHERS)

I am committed to being an ethical citizen, valuing multiple perspectives, inclusivity and empathy.

CURIOSITY

Does inquisitiveness drive my passion for learning?
Do I creatively seek knowledge and understanding?
Do I consider alternative and innovative solutions?
Do I seek to understand the past in order to navigate today and tomorrow?

Do I demonstrate wonder about the world?
Do I truly listen to understand and explore other points of view?
Do I engage with others, asking meaningful questions?

SELF-AWARENESS

Am I comfortable in my own skin?
Knowing my strengths and challenges, can I avoid the trappings of perfectionism?
Do I take care of myself by getting enough sleep, exercising, and eating well so I can be my best self?
Do I appreciate the opportunities I have?

Do I show respect, compassion and generosity towards others?
Do I show a willingness to adapt?
Do I foster healthy relationships?
Am I secure in my beliefs, even when others disagree?

GRIT

Do I work hard and finish what I begin, even after setbacks?
Am I a resilient risk-taker who is willing to fail?
Do I set priorities and identify long-term goals that give me a sense of purpose and satisfy my quest for meaning?

In the pursuit of my goals, do I consider the impact of my choices on others?
Do I show courage and perseverance in unfamiliar situations?
Am I comfortable making my goals visible?

VOICE

Am I confident in my beliefs, opinions and knowledge?
Can I articulate my feelings thoughtfully and respectfully?
Am I able to advocate for myself in the face of disapproval?
Do I reach out to others for mentoring and networking?

Do I stand up for what I believe in a positive manner?
Can I be kind, specific and helpful when providing feedback?
Do I advocate for others?
Do I know how to dissent respectfully?

LEADERSHIP

Do I set a good example, even when others aren't watching?
Do I know when to lead and when to follow?
Do I use my power for good?
Do I take responsibility for my footprint in the world?

Do I appreciate each individual's contribution?
Do I know when and how to include others?
Do I take opportunities to inspire and motivate others?
Do I take an active stance against injustices in the community?

Signature of a BSS Girl

Teacher/Staff/Parent Framework

GROWTH MINDSET (SELF)

She is committed to hard work, persistence, and a desire to learn.
She has a growth mindset.

ETHICAL CITIZENSHIP (SELF IN RELATION TO OTHERS)

She is committed to being an ethical citizen, valuing multiple perspectives, inclusivity and empathy.

CURIOSITY

The student is driven to inquire and seeks to learn.
She cares about and engages proactively in both the simple and the complex.
She is able to generate a variety of innovative solutions to problems using divergent and creative thinking.
She demonstrates deep disciplinary knowledge, skill and understanding, characterized by a commitment to excellence.
She has a strong desire to understand the multiplicity of stories that make up our heritage and to interpret them to learn about the present.

The student is interested in the world and others. She knows how to formulate meaningful questions and resourcefully seeks answers.
Respectful of, and ready to learn from, others, she is an active listener.

SELF-AWARENESS

The student has a sense of and confidence in her own identity that has evolved through action and reflection.
She knows her strengths and challenges and knows herself as a learner.
She is introspective, recognizing the importance of balance and taking responsibility for her choices. She avoids the traps of perfectionism.
She is mindful of her personal needs. She understands the importance of, and is autonomous in, successfully managing her self-care.
She appreciates and is humbled by a sense of gratitude rather than entitlement.

The student is inclusive, welcoming the opportunity to learn from others. She understands and demonstrates the reciprocal nature of empathy and respect. She is aware of her feelings in order to navigate and develop healthy relationships.
She finds inspiration through people who challenge her to explore different perspectives and she is comfortable with ambiguity.
She is culturally competent, recognizing and valuing diversity, including a plurality of civic, global and intercultural perspectives.

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Signature of a BSS Girl

Teacher/Staff/Parent Framework *(continued)*

GROWTH MINDSET (SELF)

She is committed to hard work, persistence, and a desire to learn.
She has a growth mindset.

ETHICAL CITIZENSHIP (SELF IN RELATION TO OTHERS)

She is committed to being an ethical citizen, valuing multiple perspectives, inclusivity and empathy.

GRIT

The student is an inspired and motivated learner who sees purpose in learning. With a sense of self-efficacy, she is eager to discover what is important, and translate that into making a difference in areas that matter to her.

She is an autonomous, resilient and courageous risk taker who finds lessons in failure and success.

With a passion directed toward long-term goals, she perseveres in spite of obstacles that emerge along the way.

She has a growth mindset, understanding that one can achieve excellence through hard work, dedication and the willingness to revisit, reflect and revise.

Although she has a variety of interests, she is motivated to strive for mastery, seeing learning as a desired and enduring process.

The student understands that in pursuing her goals, she needs to be aware of the impact of her decisions on others.

She understands the value of being able to share her goals with others and in doing so finds a supportive community.

She understands that by sharing her challenges she is contributing to a culture of continuous learning characterized by perseverance.

VOICE

The student is informed and articulate, confident in her beliefs, opinions and knowledge. The student advocates for herself.

She expresses her unique point of view, not afraid to have a dissenting position. She is willing to initiate difficult conversations about what others hesitate to name.

She looks for mentorship from a variety of sources to strengthen her voice, recognizing the range of supports that are available across the community.

The student advocates for herself and others. She uses her voice to be transparent about her thoughts and feelings in order to navigate and develop healthy relationships.

She accepts and offers critique productively.

LEADERSHIP

The student understands that leadership is doing the right thing and she asserts her leadership by taking purposeful action.

She understands that leadership comes in many forms; formal and informal, quiet and public, leading and following.

She recognizes the difference between leading and managing, where leadership means having the big picture not just executing the details. Her stance is that of a continuous learner.

She takes responsibility for her footprint in the world.

The student understands that healthy, reciprocal relationships are fundamental to becoming an effective leader and she knows that her success is tied to her ability to build capacity in others.

She understands that it is crucial for a leader be dependable, to keep commitments and to be true to her word.

She takes an active stance, by speaking out and taking action against, social injustices in her communities.

Glossary

Authentic

In general English usage, we say “authentic” to state that something is truly genuine and cannot be disputed, or that something is made or done in an original and/or traditional way, and is accurate and reliable. In teaching and learning, the term, “authentic” designates that the student learning in a classroom is connected to real world issues, problems or experiences.¹ John Dewey believed that authentic tasks stimulated and deepened a student’s engagement with knowledge.² More recent researchers document the markedly increased motivational value when students are engaged in authentic projects³ as well as the increased cognitive engagement including “situated cognition” where students learning in real-world contexts are much more able to transfer their knowledge to different situations.⁴

Autonomy

Autonomy is the freedom from outside control and the ability to think and act independently. In self-determination theory, or the science of motivation, autonomy is one of three powerful elements (the other two being relatedness and capacity) that work in concert to create the intrinsic motivation that is the ‘heart’ of character. Autonomy allows us to choose to act in a way that is consistent with our values. Autonomy comes with some powerful consequences. According to David Streight, “Autonomy is about having choices... about an individual’s perception of having a certain amount of control over his or her life and significant issues in it. Decades of research have shown that people who feel their actions are autonomous are more interested, more excited, and more confident about what they do. They are more persistent in their efforts, their performance is better and, as a bonus, creativity is enhanced.... The more choices teachers offer – in areas where choice is appropriate, of course – the more autonomy students feel, the higher the quality of work they produce, and apparently, the longer they remember what they have learned.”⁵

Curiosity

Curiosity is the trait of being genuinely interested in things and others. A curious mind likes to explore, investigate and uncover, with a relentless passion, whatever might be of interest. Intellectual curiosity refers to the desire to learn for the sake of learning, and is a strong predictor of academic success.⁶

Emergence

Emergence is a value that characterizes a purposeful curriculum that is focused on the interests and ideas of the children participating. It is an evolving process responding to “children’s changing needs, and interests, parental and community interests and concerns, and teachers’ priorities. Each of these key elements shapes the direction for future learning.”⁷ Valuing emergence in teaching and learning means that the curriculum, resources and strategies are focused on the students’ interests, thereby maximizing their engagement and focusing on the learning.

Empathy

Empathy is defined as “the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.” Empathy is often confused with sympathy (to have feelings of pity and sorrow for someone else’s misfortune).⁸ Thus, empathy is at the heart of what it means to be human and to be in a moral relationship with others. Recent social and educational commentators have named empathy as a key attribute in building relational skills, and for people to be able to navigate a diverse world. For example, Daniel Pink writes, “Empathy is the ability to imagine yourself in someone else’s position and to intuit what that person is feeling. It is the ability to stand in others’ shoes, to see with their eyes, and to feel with their hearts.”⁹ As we grow to value global competencies as necessary in an interconnected and collaborative world, the ability to empathize with others, especially those who are very different from oneself, and to understand the context in which others function, is of fundamental importance.

Engagement

Student engagement refers to the level of attention, passion, or interest that a student shows in her work and is a key characteristic of successful classrooms and schools. As researchers have shown, engagement is more than involvement or participation in that it requires expressive attachment as well as activity. Three areas of engagement are commonly identified: behavioural, emotional and cognitive engagement.¹⁰ Coates describes engagement as comprising the following: active and collaborative learning; participation in challenging academic activities; formative communication with academic staff; involvement in enriching educational experiences; feeling legitimated and supported by learning communities.¹¹

Ethical Citizenship

An ethical citizen is one who is not only a good neighbour but has a strong moral compass and actively participates in a wider community with an ethical respect for diversity and inclusion: “As their understanding of citizenship expands, students see that they can be improvements.”¹² Students who embrace ethical citizenship do so knowing that they are willing to learn about the world and experience, where possible, other cultures and habits, developing empathy for others.

Excellence

Excellence is defined as something that is remarkably or extraordinarily good. In learning, excellence has been narrowly defined as the ability to excel in one field, or one discipline, with an emphasis on knowledge and skills. Recently, the idea of academic excellence has been expanded to include not only excellence in reading, writing and numeracy, but also reasoning, responsibility and resilience, the last three reinforcing the first three. Sternberg argues, “the way we define excellence dictates the way we achieve it.”¹³ The values and ethic of excellence permeate a school culture by impelling “students to achieve more than they think possible.”¹⁴ Excellence might be interpreted as pursuing perfection, however, excellence is a healthy way of striving toward high goals that are reasonable and within reach, whereas perfectionism sets standards that are beyond reach. Those who pursue excellence are able to bounce back from setbacks and disappointments and take them in stride, see their mistakes as opportunities for growth and react well to critique. Excellence is achievable whereas perfection is not.

Grit

Grit generally refers to the ability to endure and carry on, particularly when encountering difficulties. In psychology, the term is used to denote the coupling of one's focus and passion for a long-term goal with the determination to achieve that goal. Dr. Angela Duckworth coined the term to describe "perseverance and passion for long-term goals" and in her research she found it to be a powerful predictor of long-term success.¹⁵

Growth Mindset

Someone has a growth mindset if she "believes that [her] most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work – brains and talent are just the starting point. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment."¹⁶ Where a fixed mindset believes that intelligence is fixed and static, a growth mindset believes that the brain is a dynamic, changing thing and its neuroplasticity, even in adult brains, means that we can grow new pathways and continuously learn. Carol Dweck's research in mindsets has extraordinary ramifications for helping students learn.

Innovation

An innovation is a new thing or process that is specifically designed to make a previous product or process better, more useful or more efficient. It could also be a departure from previous practice or process. Innovations need not be on a large scale to be impactful or effective. In education, innovation can happen in technologies, tools, practices, knowledge or ideas.

Leadership

Leadership is the ability and responsibility of inspiring and motivating others to act in particular ways for a larger purpose and acting as a role model in both quiet and public ways. Michael Fullan argues that transformative leadership has a moral purpose (actions that are intended to make a positive difference in others' lives), recognizes the complexity of bringing about change, continually builds meaningful and constructive relationships, knows the importance of turning information into knowledge that is shared, tolerates ambiguity, and seeks to make sense of things.¹⁷

Mastery

Mastery is the continual pursuit of a certain body of knowledge or focus that is of interest to each individual. It is not something to complete and set aside, but rather an ongoing quest driven by a deep desire to improve or get better. Grant Wiggins defines mastery as "[an] effective transfer of learning in authentic and worthy performance. Students have mastered a subject when they are fluent, even creative, in using their knowledge, skills, and understanding in key performance challenges and contexts at the heart of that subject, as measured against valid and high standards."¹⁸ Daniel Pink describes mastery as "the urge to get better and better at something that matters," requiring grit, perseverance and passion.¹⁹ Competence is an important aspect of mastery. David Streight says that competence refers to a person's sense of being able to "meet, and have success in the challenges of life."²⁰

Perfectionism

Perfectionism is the belief and actions associated with a refusal to accept any standard short of perfection. Perfectionists believe that perfection is attainable, both for themselves, and sometimes for others around them, and are unable to realize that their ideals are unattainable. In psychology, perfectionism is a "multidimensional personality style that is associated with a large number of psychological, interpersonal and achievement-related difficulties"²¹ including chronic stress, difficulty coping, clinical depression, anorexia nervosa and cardiovascular problems. Perfectionism among girls and women has received increased attention recently with a statistical rise in the number of girls needing psychological or psychiatric care for symptoms arising from this issue. In the public domain, the conversation about girls' and women's perfection has been heightened through the success of recent books such as Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean-In* (2013) and Deborah Spar's *Wonder Women: Sex, Power, and the Quest for Perfection* (2013).

Purpose

Purpose is about what is meaningful and having an impact beyond oneself. Individuals with purpose are driven by what matters and, for girls, purpose is often related to altruism, intention and motivation. According to William Damon, purpose is "a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self." Damon differentiates between the notion of meaning (which is related to the self) and purpose, which is "part of one's personal search for meaning, but it also has an external component – the desire to make a difference in the world, to contribute to matters larger than the self."²² Damon's research shows that young people who have a strong sense of purpose are much more likely to show a stronger sense of personal identity and meaning, and, significantly, this carries on through their lives.²³

Reciprocity

Reciprocity is a foundational value of the philosophy of Reggio Emilia and its network of schools and other classrooms that it has inspired. Loris Malaguzzi is the intellectual founder of the Reggio philosophy and he placed emphasis on reciprocity as the heart of the relationship between teacher and student. Malaguzzi used the metaphor of throwing and catching a ball to portray the dynamic in learning – the ball goes back and forth in a series of exchanges in which students and teachers act as equals, co-constructing ideas and understandings: "Learning and teaching should not stand on opposite banks and just watch the river flow by; instead they should embark together on a journey down the water. Through an active reciprocal exchange, teaching can strengthen learning how to learn."²⁴ In a broader context, the notion of reciprocity is related to engagement "which requires each of us to agree to be influenced in our common work by the other's needs and interests; my interest and need to be effective as a teacher depends on your interest and needs to gain something of value from your relationship with me as a student."²⁵

Glossary Endnotes

Relationship

A relationship is the way in which two or more things, people, or concepts are connected. In teaching and learning, research has shown that a close, positive and supportive relationship with a teacher will increase student achievement: “If a student feels a personal connection to a teacher, experiences frequent communication...then the student is more likely to become more trustful of that teacher, show more engagement in the academic content presented, display better classroom behavior, and achieve at higher levels academically.”²⁶ Beyond teacher-student relationships, those in education know that relationships matter and can make a huge difference in the success of students, and with broader goals and mandates within schools and communities. In the philosophy of Reggio-Emilia schools, the pedagogy of relationships (*pedagogia delle relazioni*) is crucial, where the “interpersonal and social relationships are seen as a means of enhancing autonomy, belonging, and individual and group learning.”²⁷ Building healthy, respectful relationships across all community members will enhance student learning, demonstrate sound civil behaviours for young people, and enhance a school’s democratic purpose.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is the belief in one’s capacities and skills to achieve a goal or succeed in particular situations. It is a sense of optimism in one’s own ability to take charge of one’s own situation. Some psychologists believe that self-efficacy is more important than talent in the search for success. The founder of self-efficacy theory, Albert Bandura, hypothesizes that the four sources of self-efficacy are mastery experiences (having success in a field will build self-belief), vicarious experiences (watching those around us), verbal persuasion (having others strengthen our own beliefs), and emotional and psychological states (being depressed will hinder self-efficacy, while feeling positive will boost confidence).²⁸

Transparency

Transparency is both a value and a way of living in the schools of Reggio Emilia, and increasingly in other schools. The curriculum and the children’s work are made transparent through a process of making the students’ learning visible to the community through pedagogical documentation. Carla Rinaldi describes this process as “visible listening”²⁹ where notes, photos, video, children’s work is used to reconstruct the learning path and made available for all to see. Transparency is also a value of the school in that it welcomes families, new ideas, and is open to conversation around learning. In the classrooms, it also refers to the openness of the rooms, the lights, mirrors and glass that allow learning to be reflected.

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