

MYP Language Policy
International Baccalaureate School 0703 Middle Years Programme
XXXIII Liceum Ogólnokształcące Dwujęzyczne
im. Mikołaja Kopernika Warszawa,

"Language as a structure is on its inner face the mold of thought."

Sapir (1921)

"Every language is a vast pattern-system, [...] by which the personality not only communicates, but also analyses nature, notices or neglects types of relationship and phenomena, channels his reasoning, and builds the house of his consciousness."

Whorf (1941)

"Language is so deeply embedded in many subjects of the [...] curriculum that it is sometimes difficult to separate learning the concepts and processes of a subject from learning to use language to represent and use these concepts and processes"

Open University Language ... (1972)

"Concepts and the language that infuses and implements them give power and strategy to cognitive activity"

Bruner (1962)

This MYP Language Policy has been developed in accordance with the IBO Second-language Acquisition and Mother-tongue Development: A guide for schools published in 2004, and Language and learning in IB programmes issued in 2011.

Introduction

Recent decades have witnessed sweeping technological changes affecting all dimensions of life: political, economic, social and personal. The increasing pace of development especially in the telecommunications industry has significantly facilitated digital information exchange throughout the world, thus contributing towards the global village effect. In the face of the newly emerging global society and knowledge-based economy, multilingualism has come to occupy a prominent position on the European Union's educational and political agenda. To quote the European Commission's White Paper on Teaching and Learning (1995:51), "it is becoming necessary for everyone... to be able to acquire and keep up their ability to communicate in at least two Community languages in addition to their mother tongue." With the growing realisation that basic literacy in one's own language is not enough to face the challenge of becoming a global citizen in the twenty-first century, in 2002 the European Council in Barcelona called for further action "to improve the mastery of basic skills, in particular by teaching at least two foreign languages from a very early age." Changes in the perception of language learning and the growing importance of multilingualism have led to the development of innovative approaches in teaching methodologies.

The role of language in education

MYP World School No 0703 recognizes that language occupies the central position in education. Seemingly apart, the learning of language and the learning of the world are in fact closely interrelated: a

reality is constructed through language, but at the same time language itself is part of this reality. With its underlying language-centred philosophy, MYP World School 0703 lends weight to the all-important role of language in the process of cognitive development, which, in Plotnik's phrase (1999), refers to "...how a person perceives, thinks, and gains an understanding of his or her world..." Progressing slowly from stage to stage, this intellectually disciplined process is marked by the steady growth of reasoning capacities. Thus, what students are taught at school is not only a collection of concepts but also a way of perceiving, thinking about, classifying and evaluating all that refers to external and internal reality. The development of higher order mental activities associated with cognitive functioning and literacy-related activities is believed to prepare the MYP students for life-long learning.

The Middle Years Programme in IB No 0703 is founded on the concept of language across the curriculum: "language is central to learning; learning involves language not just as a passive medium for instruction but as the principal means of forming and handling new concepts" (Kołodziejska and Simpson 2000:11). Regardless of the subject area, new concepts are necessarily assimilated through language. It is assumed that while being inextricably tied to thought processes language gives shape to the thinking that is taking place. Thus what students invariably do when they attempt to explain or express personal interpretations of the newly acquired concepts is not only to broaden their general knowledge of various subject fields, but also to enhance their understanding of the ways in which language is used in each.

Bilingual education

Languages of instruction

In IB School No 00703 the MYP curricular subjects are taught through the medium of students' native language (Language A) and English (Language B: Grade Level 7 *Phase 3*, Grade Level 8 *Phase 4*, Grade Level 9 *Phase 5*, Grade Level 10 *Phase 6*). Our MYP students generally come from non-English speaking backgrounds, but have reached a threshold level of linguistic competence, and demonstrate a sufficient degree of general cognitive maturity to cope in context reduced, cognitively demanding situations. Thus language in its two varieties is seen as vehicles for the construction of knowledge in different areas of the curriculum, and is used for conceptualising, drawing abstract relationships, symbolising, metaphorising and reasoning.

Owing to the fact that English is not the students' mother tongue, anyone wishing to apply to IB School No 00703 is requested to take the Entrance Examination, which contributes to determining whether or not students can access and comprehend the curriculum partially in English. The terms and conditions of the recruitment process are determined and specified yearly by the Head of School in cooperation with the MYP Coordinator and staff. Once defined, the recruitment criteria are made public on the school website.

Aside from offering the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme, our school simultaneously runs the standard national programme, at the end of which mandatory national examinations are conducted in the students' native language. To this end, equal status of the two languages is ensured, and a balance is sustained between their development. In view of the foregoing, the language of instruction alternates between L1 Polish and L2 English. With the time of instruction in each language variety being generally distributed on a 50/50 basis, students develop their knowledge of essential subject terminology in the two linguistic systems. As a result, they successfully pass the middle school exit exams in their mother tongue, and participate in the external moderation process in English without any difficulty. On completion of the programme students satisfying the official requirements are

awarded the MYP certificate, which indicates an overall standard of achievement in all aspects of the MYP.

Recognising the growing significance of foreign languages in the newly emerging global society, our school aims at fostering a supportive learning environment, where the major emphasis is on the development of students' language skills. Not only do we put special emphasis on bilingual education, but we also strive for trilingualism running German courses tailored to students' needs. Under special circumstances, students may be further supported and receive additional individual language instruction where appropriate. It is expected that the school and parents cooperate in the development of students' language skills while teachers take account of their individual needs and styles. With the stress on developing students' reading, writing, speaking and listening skills, teachers employ varied teaching methods and techniques.

The role of teachers involved in the MYP

The recognition of language as the principle means of forming and handling new concepts has significant implications for the linguistic competence of each teacher involved in this programme. With the two languages being taught simultaneously in all subjects of the curriculum, every single teacher is responsible for developing students' higher language functions and stimulating their higher order mental activities associated with cognitive functioning and literacy-related activities.

The prime objective is to demonstrate learners how language and literacy practices, including lexical-grammatical structures and different types of discourse markers, as well as diverse text types can convey meaning in particular curriculum areas. It clearly follows that aside from having an extensive knowledge base about their subjects, teaching, and learning strategies, teachers of all academic disciplines are also competent philologists of both the native tongue and the second language. Additionally, Language B teachers work more closely with teachers from other departments, and offer language support related to the specific needs of the interdisciplinary or integrated curriculum.

Benefits of bilingual education

The use of an additional language for the learning and teaching of both content and language is assumed to bring considerable benefits, ranging from the development of intercultural knowledge, understanding, and communication skills, through diversified methods and forms of classroom practice, to increased learners' motivation and confidence in both the language and the subject being taught. It is also believed to create a window of opportunity to study content through different perspectives, and to increase exposure to the language without requiring extra time in the curriculum.

In World School No 00703 students are provided with ample opportunity to use their native language and English alternately. The ongoing interaction between the two linguistic systems lays the foundations for their mutually reciprocating relationship. As a result of this unique interrelationship between the two languages, students are expected to demonstrate a more sophisticated use of their first language: better text-developing skills, more complex and well-constructed sentences, and a more selective use of vocabulary. To quote Kecskes (2003:11),

"[...] the L1-dominated conceptual base is being gradually restructured making space for and engaging with the new knowledge and information coming through the second language channel. This leads to the gradual development of a conscious awareness of how another culture is different from one's own culture, the ability to reflect upon this difference in language production, and the development of an identity that is the reflection of the dual culture.

It follows that the addition of L2 and its culture to the curriculum is unlikely to replace or displace students' native tongue and culture. To quote Cummins (2000:182), "the continued development of academic proficiency in bilinguals' two languages is associated with enhanced metalinguistic, academic, and cognitive functioning." Emphasis is put in our school on raising students' awareness and understanding of their own culture and other cultures, and, by implication, on developing their international mindedness. When seen in this light, the unique coexistence of the two linguistic systems in the school curriculum serves as an excellent illustration of additive bilingualism.

Language and curriculum

MYP World School No 00703 offers an interdisciplinary or integrated curriculum, with units of study organised thematically around overarching concepts that serve to connect academic content areas. Such a curriculum organisation "cuts across subject-matter lines to focus upon comprehensive life problems or broad based areas of study that brings together various segments of the curriculum into meaningful association" (Good 1973). This type of curriculum is predicated upon the student's cognitive structure, which incorporates a vast network of schemata providing anchoring structures into which specific information can be fitted in particular contexts. Meaningful learning results in the progressive differentiation of the cognitive structure in terms of detail and specificity through the quantitative addition of knowledge to the conceptual framework, and the subsequent conceptual restructuring which produces new mental patterns of interrelationships.

Rather than being taught in isolation as discrete departmentalised subject matter, curriculum areas are thus brought together into meaningful association, as a result of which students adopt a broader perspective on the points at issue. What assists in flexible and versatile handling of information are higher language functions. As facilitators, enabling the smooth transfer of acquired knowledge to other contexts, the language functions in question inevitably affect the perception of knowledge. Consequently, knowledge is no longer regarded as consisting of a series of disconnected items, independent pieces of information, facts, memories, or experiences. Neither is it considered in terms of individual academic disciplines which are unrelated to one another. Instead, the body of knowledge is viewed as comprising a number disciplines tied to one another through inferential relationships.

Intended to assist learners in connecting content which they might otherwise perceive as being disjointed, the conceptual approach to developing curriculum units brings considerable benefits to students. The first and most obvious is the adoption of multiple perspectives on the same content, with a clearer understanding of the utility and broad applicability of what is studied. The second is the considerable potential for reaching more students on account of the capacity to tap into a variety of interest areas. Then there is a substantial improvement in students' ability to retain, retrieve and use the content of study. Last but not least, there is a marked shift of emphasis from rote memorisation of facts towards conceptual understanding which, by its very nature, promotes meaningful learning.

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