Language

Language in the PYP

Summary
• Language learning includes the development of home and family languages, languages of the school, additional languages and literacy. • Language is a means of affirming and expressing cultural identity and developing international-mindedness. • Multilingualism benefits learns and the learning community in a variety of ways. • Schools provide students with multiple, authentic opportunities to learn language, learn about language and learn through language. • The student language portrait is a tool that captures a learner's complex language profile.

Language development

The development of language is fundamental to the instinctive human need to communicate. Language learning includes the development of the home and family languages, the languages of the school, additional languages and the development of literacy. This is integral to exploring and sustaining cognitive and personal development and cultural identity. Language learning and teaching are social acts, dependent on relationships with the self and others, with context, with the environment, and with the world. The Primary Years Programme (PYP) beliefs and values about language are embedded implicitly throughout the learner profile and explicitly through the attribute of "communicator", as well as in the IB's approaches to learning. Through an IB education, PYP learning communities use language to build a better and more peaceful world.

A culture of language learning is foundational to a PYP learning community. Language has the power to bring the learning community closer together and overcome boundaries. It excites and invites communication in many ways, supporting and strengthening relationships and the building of international-mindedness. Language learning is located in both local and global communities. Students are able to flourish in an interconnected, mobile global community using technologies to communicate and sustain relationships. At the same time, they are rooted in local communities through cultural and linguistic knowledge and skills.

IB schools are committed to multilingualism as a means of affirming cultural identity and developing international-mindedness. The term "multilingualism" in the PYP refers to linguistic ability in more than one language, and recognizes that each of a student's languages may be developed to different levels, and within different contexts, depending on their social and academic experiences.

In addition, multilingualism has cognitive benefits relating to:

- attention and focus
- problem-solving thinking skills
- thinking about language.

(Kessler, Quinn 1980; Zelasko, Antunez 2000)

Multilingualism is the interplay among languages within a person, with their interactions with others and also with the learning community's attitudes towards languages. Becoming multilingual is a means through which we deepen our understandings of alternative perspectives and reach out to others. It takes into account the complex reality of our world's diverse sociocultural contexts.

Students who are multilingual have an improved capacity to think, talk and reflect on how languages work, which is why PYP students learn at least one additional language from the age of seven. Through learning additional languages, students become cognitively more flexible, creative and better at problem-solving. Students who see and hear their own languages within the learning environment, and who are encouraged to actively make links to their prior linguistic experiences, connect more quickly to the community and their own learning (Cummins 2000).

All members of the learning community are interested in, engaged with and inquire about languages, and see themselves as agents in the process.

The language learner

Confident communicators

PYP students learn to communicate confidently and creatively in more than one language, and with awareness of the power of language to have an impact on others. This is reflected in their language choices concerning style, tone, words, expression and gesture.

Through language, students:

- express identity
- develop international mindedness
- become literate
- become effective inquirers
- communicate.

Expressing identity

The PYP school welcomes all students and seeks to understand, affirm and promote their language and cultural backgrounds through the learning community and curriculum. All students have a unique language profile shaped by relationships and interactions within their own family, culture and the wider world. The continued development of home and family languages is crucial for cognitive growth and in nourishing cultural identity.

Student language profiles

The complex and diverse language profiles among students may mean that they are learning in a language additional to that of their home and family, or of their prior educational experience. School may be the first time that students encounter an additional language or they may already be proficient in several languages. Some students are familiar with the language of their school while, for others, the values, beliefs and behaviours around language and literacy are new.

The student language portrait

Language backgrounds, experiences and goals are some of the factors inherent in a student's language profile. These factors may be captured through the tool of a student language portrait.

The portrait may also include students' perspectives and preferences, interviews with families and examples of language competencies in home and family languages. This information informs planning, enabling teachers to tap into the knowledge and strengths of students and facilitate further language development.

Developing international-mindedness

Multilingualism is significant in building international-mindedness as it gives students insight into the thinking and perspectives of the self and others. Language enables students to gather and compare points of view, and to show empathy, compassion and respect.

Students' skills, knowledge and understandings of language play a fundamental role in the development of the attributes of the learner profile, for example, as communicators. Shared understandings of language are constructed and contribute to an ongoing exploration into what it means to be internationally minded.

Becoming literate

Literacy invites the student into new ways of making meaning and exploring the world through language. Language students make meaning from written, viewed or oral text and apply their developing understandings of symbolic cues. Multiliteracies involve students in different ways of accessing and making meaning, including digital technologies and their vast potential for expression and audience. Through literacy, students uncover perspectives in texts and learn about the power of communication. Literature is a source of pleasure as well as thoughtful provocation as students use it to explore other ways of knowing and seeing the world.

Becoming effective inquirers

Language is intrinsic to learning. It underpins the capacity to think critically and creatively, to inquire and collaborate. It is the primary means through which knowledge is accessed and processed, and through which conceptual understandings are developed; it is the means to reflect on ideas, knowledge and experiences.

Communicating

The language of school is different in many respects from the languages children learn and use at home. Students and teachers use language for specific purposes and within particular learning contexts, and these influence the language choices made. Language supports relationship-building and the negotiation of meaning. Through language, students communicate their ideas and understandings to the local and wider learning community using multiple modes of expression. Students use language to:

- question and probe

- set limits and break boundaries

- compare, explain and influence.

The language learning community

School culture is a manifestation of the relationships, beliefs and values of a learning community. It shapes the ways members act and interact, and expresses the principles and values that underpin thinking and communicating. Every PYP learning community has a unique linguistic and cultural profile that forms the basis for its language policy and curriculum. For this reason, each school develops a school language policy that makes the most of its linguistic and cultural resources to meet its individual needs.

> TSM: Reviewing a language policy

Using home and family languages in school supports students who are new to the language of instruction. It engages them quickly in learning by helping them to access their prior knowledge. Parents have a vital role to play as they discuss learning at home with students, deepening understandings across and beyond the programme of inquiry. This also enables connections among languages to develop.

A learning community builds a positive culture of language learning by:

- embedding the values and beliefs that underpin multilingualism, such as being open-minded, caring communicators

- recognizing the importance of belonging and connectedness in personal and cultural identities

- recognizing the vital role families play in supporting, developing and sustaining children's language development

- creating environments where students use their home language with pride, and access host or global languages to engage with the world

- actively promoting the maintenance and development of home languages

- developing students' metalinguistic skills and understandings by facilitating and actively encouraging opportunities to make connections between languages

- ensuring that multiple languages are seen and heard throughout the school and in communication between home and school

- promoting language learning as a means to build and strengthen intercultural relationships

- reflecting on the community's effectiveness of building a positive culture of language learning through collaboration.

Becoming a multilingual learning community

Learning communities view language as part of the learning landscape and encourage students to identify the connections between languages and attributes of the learner profile. Creating a multilingual learning environment is a collaborative process involving all members. Learning communities collaborate to establish shared understandings about language, and reach agreements together through the discussion and exploration of perspectives. Students are agents of this process, exploring and establishing classroom agreements about the role and value of languages in the classroom and sharing their linguistic knowledge and skills with the learning community.

TSM: Student language agreements

Children are naturally curious about other languages. Multilingual schools intentionally provide opportunities to explore language and stimulate curiosity and open-mindedness in a spirit of inquiry. These might include seeing, hearing and sharing languages:

- spoken and sung

- displayed on different alphabet and number charts, posters, labels

- used in learning spaces, games, poetry and performances

- used in learning displays

- used within identity texts*, and bilingual texts (oral, written, digital, poetic, musical, and so on)

- chosen for the exhibition

- through technology

- in explorations of the similarities and differences between languages

- through learning experiences within a unit of inquiry

- from other members of the learning community

- within the context of action.

*(Cummins 2001)

In planning for the programme of inquiry, a learning community takes multilingual diversity into account and provides opportunities for its development within individuals, groups and the local and global learning community.

Beyond the languages of the learning community, opportunities to explore the multilingual nature of the world might include inquiries into family languages, historical or geographical languages within the local community, and the relationships among languages and cultures of the learning or local and global community.

TSM: How multilingual is my school—A self-audit tool

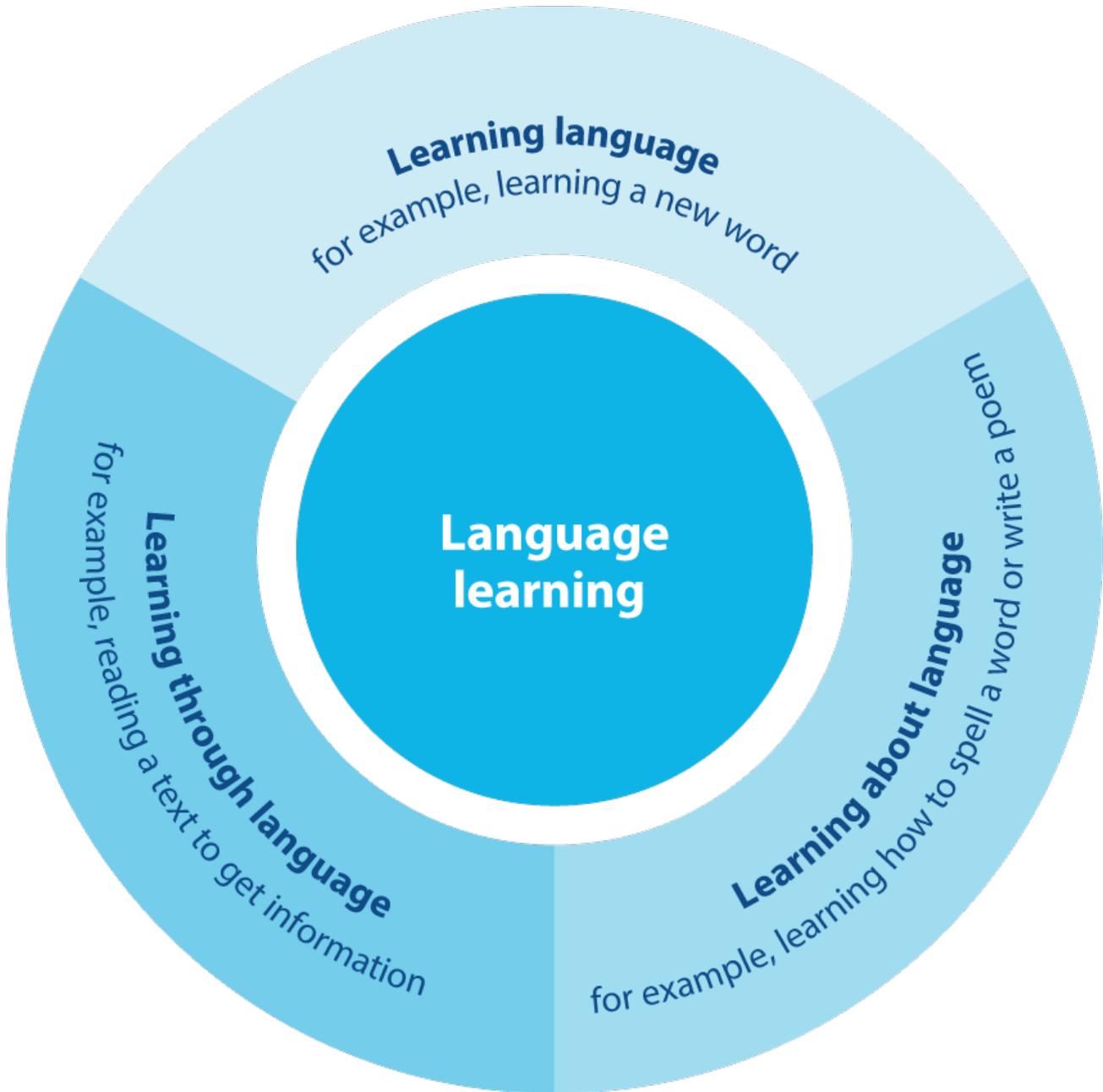# Language learning and teaching

Language learning—An overview

Language provides an intellectual structure for conceptual and critical thinking within and beyond the PYP transdisciplinary framework. All teachers are language teachers as all learning takes place through

language. This is particularly evident in the early years where learning and teaching has a strong focus on language development.

All students bring a significant body of language knowledge to school with them; knowledge about language and the way it works, knowledge about learning language, and knowledge of the social role of language. This includes understandings of literacy developed in the home and family language in either formal or family contexts.

Language learning and teaching immerses students in the interplay between learning language, learning through language and learning about language. Although these aspects are inseparable, they are used here to support an understanding of how language is learned and used to make meaning.

Learning language
for example, learning a new word

Learning about language
for example, learning how to spell a word or write a poem

Learning through language
for example, reading a text to get information

Language learning

(Adapted from Halliday 1985)

Learning language

Learning takes place when new knowledge is integrated with existing knowledge and conceptual frameworks. Students' language development is best served when they have opportunities to strengthen and build these frameworks by engaging in language learning in multiple modes within authentic, meaningful contexts. In an inquiry-based classroom, teachers and students enjoy using language, appreciating its functionality and aesthetics. They have opportunities to engage with multiple languages through a variety of modes, such as literature, drama, story writing, technology and discussion. They reflect on their form and use across and within transdisciplinary and subject-specific contexts.

Students seek to make meaning from what they see and hear, and in responding to others they test out their hypotheses of language. From the responses they receive, students formulate new understandings of language and how it works. Teachers and others in the learning community that students interact with, interpret and rephrase, question and provide models in this process. This extends the knowledge, skills and understandings that students develop; inherent in this process is the absorption of values about language and learning.

Language learning is a complex developmental process. PYP *Language scope and sequence* (2009) presents a set of diagnostic tools and guidance, underpinned by conceptual understandings. This assists teachers in planning language learning experiences for students and in monitoring their language development. Schools may decide to use or adapt the *Language scope and sequence* (IBO 2009) according to their needs. Teachers facilitate effective language learning when they:

- explicitly activate prior knowledge using home and family languages, and other languages where appropriate
- use their knowledge of students' prior language skills and understandings to personalize learning engagements
- identify language learning opportunities and co-construct learning goals within and across units of inquiry, and learning engagements (for example, in a unit of inquiry around habitats, teachers and students together identify the language used to classify features; in an inquiry about health and body systems, students would have the opportunity to explore terms needed to express cause and effect)

- record and share information to map development, plan for language learning and co-construct goals

- incorporate strategies needed to activate and build background knowledge when planning units of inquiry or lessons

- reflect on language obstacles to learning and how to remove them

- scaffold learning to extend language.

Scaffolding language learning

Scaffolding supports the assimilation of new language. Scaffolds are temporary supports given as new language is acquired. Question prompts when reading, picture prompts for story sequencing, or use of the home and family language to carry out research, are all examples of scaffolding. Other examples include:

- visual and practical aids (including technology)

- teacher language and questioning

- graphic organizers

- demonstrations

- dramatizations

- small, structured collaborative groups

- breaking learning into steps

- modelling by thinking out loud

- pre-teaching vocabulary

- translanguaging strategies.

Extending language

Teachers extend students' language learning by scaffolding opportunities using collaborative practices with rich text. As students progress through school they interact with increasingly sophisticated texts. These reflect the growing complexity of academic language and concepts, such as subject-specific vocabulary and grammatical constructions. From the early years, students begin to use complex functions of language, such as classifying, justifying, hypothesizing, clarifying, explaining,

comparing, and so on, at a developmentally appropriate level. By being aware of the nature of language used in school, teachers can extend students' language repertoires.

The academic language of school is complex and context-specific; it therefore takes longer to acquire than language used in a social environment. Teachers explicitly model and scaffold the use of academic language in context and co-construct language learning goals in collaboration with students and other teachers, where possible. The student language portrait helps teachers learn more about the students' language experiences and enables them to understand how students' languages might best be integrated in school contexts.

Learning additional languages

The PYP requires the acquisition of an additional language from the age of 7 to support the development of international-mindedness. This additional language might be the language of the host country or another language that is part of the curriculum or community. Bilingual and dual language schools do not need to add another language to the curriculum, but may choose to do so.

New to the language of instruction

Students come to school with a wide range of language backgrounds, and for many students this may be the first time that they encounter the language of instruction used at school. Schools have language support and structures in place to ensure inclusivity for students for whom the language of instruction is not their home and family language or the language of their prior school experience.

Students learning additional languages are simultaneously processing more than one language and this extra work for the brain is tiring. Where the student is immersed in a language environment unfamiliar to them, there is an enormous amount of cultural information to be absorbed alongside the language, including unfamiliar patterns of social interaction. The learning community is concerned with the well-being of all students and is aware of the needs of additional language learners. Schools take the time and make the effort to support and develop this awareness among all stakeholders.

Affirming identity

Key to student language development is valuing the language profiles of students. Using artifacts, people, language resources, activities and other opportunities to enrich the learning community enables students to connect personally to their learning, to promote self-efficacy and to build

intercultural understanding. These environments support the development of the attributes of the learner profile.

Identity can be affirmed by:

- establishing a learning environment that welcomes and embraces diversity in languages, cultures and perspectives
- valuing and using diversity as a resource to enhance learning
- providing opportunities to sustain home and family languages
- involving the learning community in establishing understandings of how best to collaborate to achieve shared goals.

Learning through language

As communicators and collaborators, students engage with language at school in multiple contexts and multiple modes. They listen, read, speak, perform, write and view text in order to make meaning, and explore and share new understandings and knowledge. Learning is embedded within language and is underpinned by relationships as a reciprocal meaning-making process.

Teachers scaffold language within learning in order to facilitate successful access to the resources and ideas students need in the pursuit of their inquiries. They use language to provoke thought, spark interest and promote independent, motivated learners. Teachers are aware of barriers to learning that language might create, and personalize support for students when necessary. Understanding that language is important in accessing knowledge, ideas and ways of thinking in subject areas; teachers ensure that students have the appropriate linguistic tools with which to learn.

Translanguaging

Students use language most effectively by drawing on all their prior linguistic resources, their skills and knowledge about language and language learning. They benefit from awareness of the similarities and differences between their languages in phonemic, syntactic and grammatical aspects. Translanguaging is the process by which language students actively draw on all their linguistic resources to communicate and make meaning (Garcia, Li Wei 2014). This occurs, for example, when using bilingual books or working with someone who speaks the same language. By providing

opportunities for students to make connections between their languages and to draw on prior knowledge, the teacher facilitates effective learning while affirming identity (Cummins 2000).

To support agency in language learning and effectively incorporate translanguaging strategies, students discuss what language means to them personally and set language goals for themselves. A powerful means to establish a multilingual class community is for students to develop their own "student language agreements" as a group or learning community (Chumak-Horbatsch 2012).

TSM: Translanguaging

Learning about language

Language is a visual, print and oral symbolic system with its own codes and signals. Therefore, language learning also involves learning about language—its form, conventions and contextual use.

Literacy

Through early experiences of reading with adults, children learn that reading is an enjoyable, achievable and rewarding activity. They learn that text conveys meaning and perceive the print concepts, codes and conventions in the languages of their home and family and school. Drawing attention to the wide range and variety of texts around us (including stories, poems, digital media, lists, instructions and posters) supports this process.

Texts in multiple languages in the home and the learning community are opportunities to understand different perspectives and develop understandings of the multilingual nature of our world. Family literacy traditions vary widely among different cultures, and teachers show interest in learning about these in order to better support students and their families.

At school, students and parents are invited to share home and family language texts. Students hear the sounds of other languages and develop awareness of different phonemic systems by joining in with poetry and songs. Other writing systems are displayed and discussed as students are invited to share their personal literacy knowledge with others. Schools explore ways to represent students' literacy backgrounds in the learning environment and reflect on their success. These activities help build early metalinguistic skills to support the development of other languages. As students develop

understandings that other people communicate in ways that are the same and different from us, they strengthen and promote international-mindedness.

Multiliteracies

As the nature of literacy has changed in our world through developments in technology, education and the workplace, so our understandings of text, literacy and literacy practices have changed. Text can exist in a paper mode, live mode, electronic mode or a combination of these (Anstey, Bull 2006). These combined forms are called "multimodal" texts; for example, websites often have writing, pictures, cartoons or videos all operating in unison to communicate ideas. A book combining pictures and writing is also multimodal, as is a performance that combines music and movement.

The term "multiliterate" is used to describe a person who successfully engages with texts that are paper, live, electronic or multimodal—from simple signs to discussions, presentations, art, music and complex interactive digital technologies, in both receptive and productive modes. Multiliteracy recognizes the complexity of engaging with text, and the choices and decisions inherent in understanding and producing text. Electronic, live and paper texts in all modes offer new opportunities and challenges to students to engage in learning. Through text, their understandings and views of the world and the self are influenced by new information, ideas and possibilities. Students require the ability to make strategic, ethical choices and decisions as informed, internationally minded communicators. Schools ensure that resources reflect the diverse cultural backgrounds of local and global communities.

Critical literacy

Critical literacy enables students to become active and reflective members of learning communities. Students learn to identify perspectives, purpose and techniques within texts, and identify how an audience is positioned by a writer or producer of text in order to present their point of view. Across the curriculum, students develop critical literacy through classroom experiences such as questioning and comparing texts, relating text to prior knowledge, and sharing personal reactions and experiences in everyday life.

Reflection on the power of language to convey perspectives supports the development of intercultural understanding. Through text, students imagine and empathize with the lives of others and explore perspectives more deeply. They are encouraged to reflect on the connections between

language and culture, and to draw on their personal linguistic repertoires (Blommaert 2010) to make and communicate meaning. Used together, the background knowledge of students and the literacy experiences of the learning community strengthen the voices of all the cultures within a school.

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